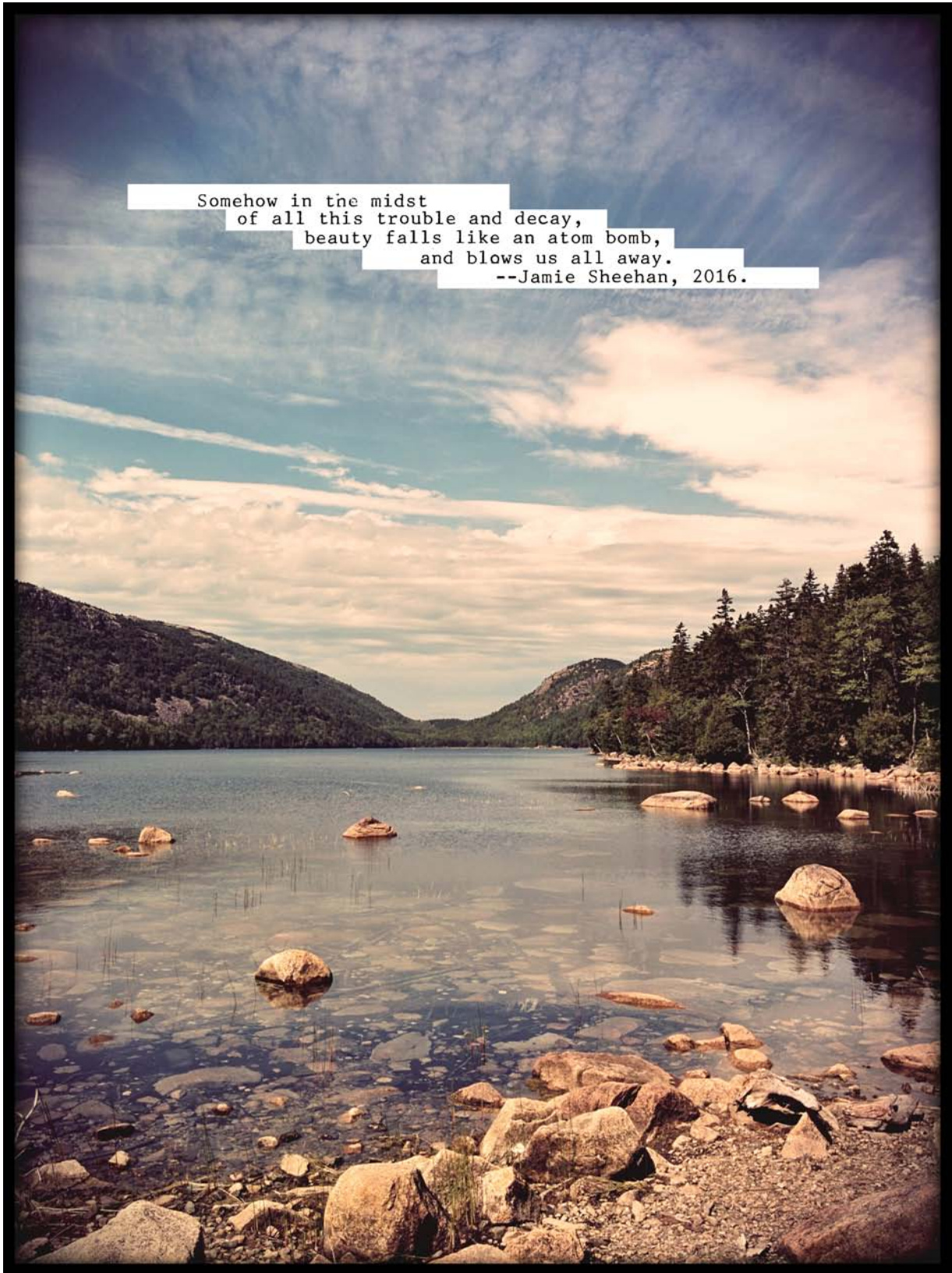


The Cenacle



NUMBER 97 ♣ OCTOBER 2016

Somehow in the midst
of all this trouble and decay,
beauty falls like an atom bomb,
and blows us all away.
--Jamie Sheehan, 2016.



From Soulard's Notebooks

October 22, 2016
Caffé Bene—Back Bay
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my tenth letter to you, eighth since you've been the sitting American President. I've written to you annually since 2008, & also publish each letter in my independent literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

I want to thank you for the response to my letter to you from last year. It confirmed to me how seriously you take the global environmental crisis, & my belief that leaving office will not slow your call for serious & immediate action. Again, thank you.

Eighth & final letter to you while you are President, since you transition out of office in just a few months. This election season you are out on the campaign trail on Hillary Clinton's behalf. Funny, in a way, given that in 2008 your victorious path to the White House involved stymieing her own. But then you made her your Secretary of State, & I believe this has helped her to hone her knowledge of both foreign & domestic policy even more. She's a successor-in-waiting to your two terms in office, even as she carries with her also her experiences in the U.S. Senate, & of course those from the 1990s as First Lady.

I think as much as the presidential election is most in the public eye right now, it's your time in office, the very fact of your election in 2008, that is most massively shaping this election. For the Democrats, while Senator Bernie Sanders represented a proposed sea changing outsider campaign, somewhat similar to your own in 2008, it was the familiarity factor with Clinton that won out. His was the *repudiation* candidacy (to put it simplistically), while hers has been the *continuance* campaign.

Why? Because the Republicans have become the party not just of No, but of *No Fucking Way*. For eight long years, they have slowed your efforts on economic recovery, financial reform, healthcare legislation, jobs creation, etc., etc. Their goal of total D.C. gridlock, from before you even took office in 2009, has been frequently successful.

So as much as Sen. Sanders talked a good game, more people didn't want another "outsider" (in this case an Independent who caucuses with the Democrats) running head-first & futilely into gridlock for four or eight more years. More chose the ultimate insider, a woman whose personal life has been flayed wide open for *decades*. She can't be shook. Her progressive principles (and she's letting these show *because* of being in your administration, as well as contesting Sanders) are steel to the core. My guess is she'll be as progressive domestically as you tried to be, maybe more if the Democrats take back Congress, & probably no less willing than you have been to try diplomacy on the world stage. Pacifists, either of you? No. Neither of you have ever promised anything like that. More inclined to avoid "dumb wars" & to protect "American interests" (*money, money, money*).

And your presidency inadvertently *invented* Donald Trump. This birther-spouting, wall-erecting, Muslim-hating, small-fingered, girl-groping, tax-evading, Russian-loving, flaming monstrosity of a humanoid emerged from the deepest, vilest swamps of American racism, misogyny, exceptionalism, & pseudo-capitalist bullshit. He's like the Frankenstein monster of everything this country has ever done wrong to itself & to the world. And he'll still get 45% of the vote in the election &, of the 300 million people in this country, *come in just second to succeed you*. Whatever Clinton becomes as President, & I hope she far exceeds the low expectations most have for her, it was the fact of *your* presidency, its successes & failures, & what the Republican Party has turned into as a result of it, which will have gotten her elected.

When you came into office in 2009, you were seen as the ultimate repudiation for eight long *LONG* years of George W. Bush. The country was in two wars. The economy was in shambles. We millions expected miracles from you. What we've gotten from you has been eight years of hard,

relentless effort to clean up W's tall tall shit-pile, & to try to turn the nation's focus toward helping its most vulnerable citizens—as well as re-joining the globe of nations in repudiating the more blatant dreams for American Empire in the 21st century.

I've re-read all of my letters to you from the past 8½ years. I've concluded tonight that we were all naïve about how much you could do as President. Between the valid Constitutional separation of powers, & the pernicious corporate & other special interests that mostly own the federal government, one man with eight years can only do so much.

And yet, that said, you did a whole lot. The country is better off than it was eight years ago. More prosperous, more peaceful. Better for everyone, in all important cases? No. Drones still kill innocent people around the globe. Wires still tap into people's private lives. Donald Trump is still *too close* to the presidency.

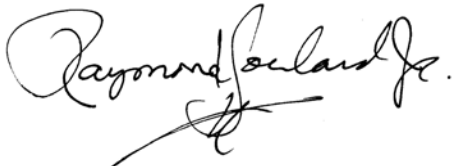
But I believe you did a lot of good. You drew down wars. Many now have healthcare who didn't. The jobless rate is far lower. We are talking again with countries like Iran & Cuba. The global environmental crisis is being taken *much* more seriously.

You restored civility & intelligence & order to your office. You made it good again to be a President who can grapple with the complexities of the nation & the world. You raised the expectations we have for your successors, & what good he or she vows to do for the most vulnerable among us.

I will miss you as President. Miss writing to you, like this, even if I were to choose to write to you again. You are a good man, Barack, & I feel very fortunate to have been a witness to your time of leadership. I suspect it will go on in other ways next year & beyond.

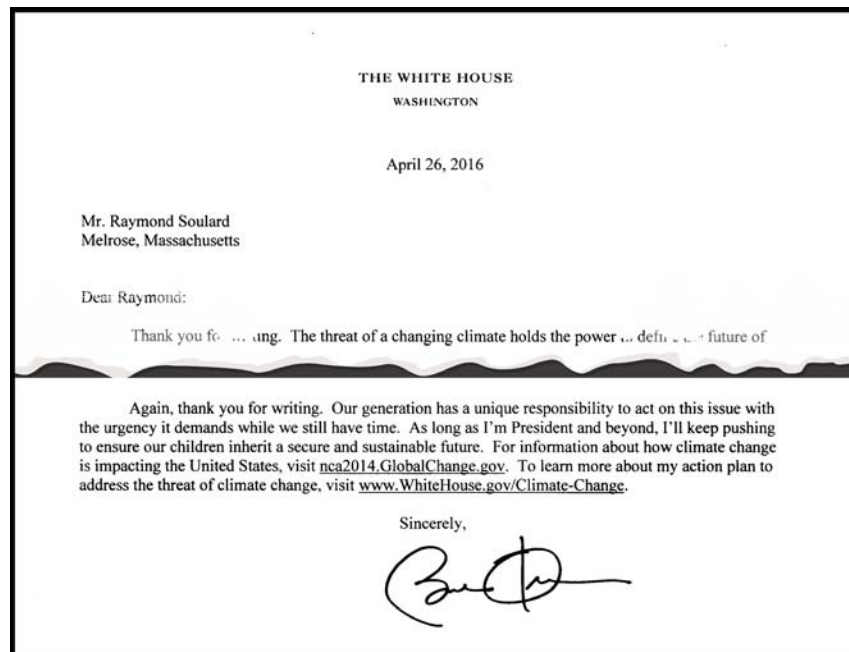
You have my respect, my affection, & my best wishes, as before, so hereon.

Peace,



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The Cenacle

NUMBER 97 ♦ OCTOBER 2016

Edited by Raymond Soulad Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Soulard

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NEW ENGLAND
2016

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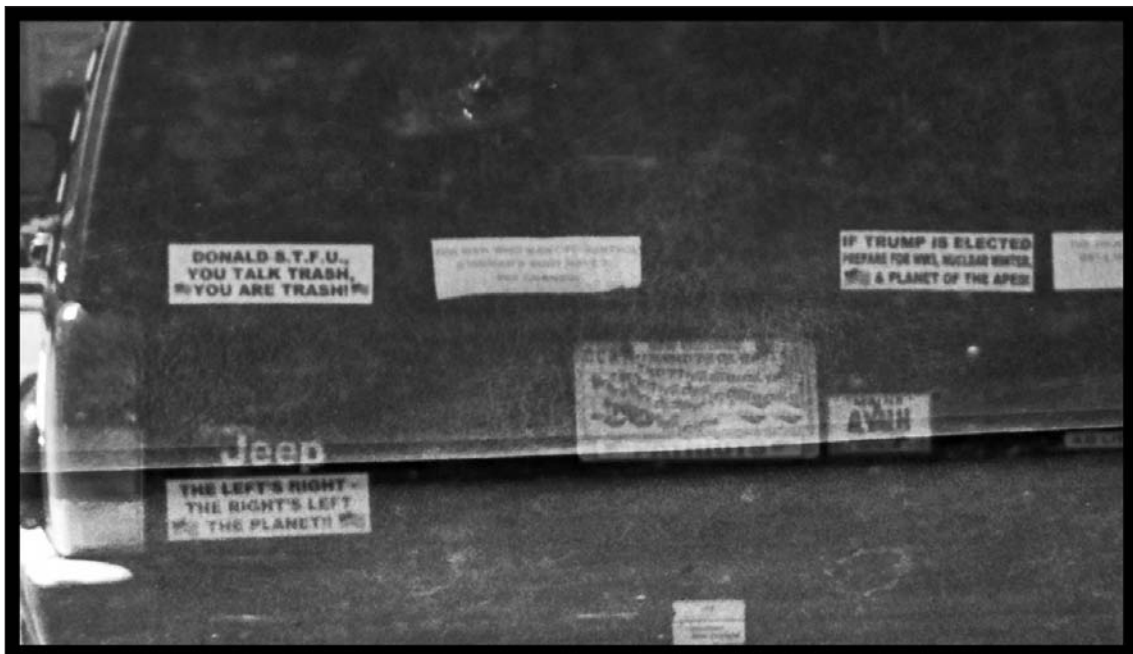
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KD & I would like to note with respect & affection the passing of our dear friend, Genie Hargrove. Though known at a distance, still much happiness in calling you friend, & sadness at your departure.



Feedback on Cenacle 96 | April 2016

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I must say that what caught my attention most in *Cenacle* 96 was the haiku of Judih Haggai. Each poem is spare, yet full; brief yet succinct; gentle yet strong. Her style is charming and uniquely hers—and gets across much in few words. The poem beginning “tiniest flaws” takes a leap from the page; I relate to this especially well (I have new glasses too). “Her biggest heart” evokes a melancholy tale requiring strength, if not heroism, in the face of adversity, not to mention undertones of unglossed mortality. I look forward to more enchantment from Ms. Haggai in future issues.

From Colin James:

In “Love in Puerto Rico,” Charlie Beyer takes us, takes himself without the comfort, to that most unrealistic of lifestyles that subliminally we may all crave. I, for one, was there with him. Cheap hotels are the modern unromantic escapism, the dirty walls of reality. Sex has eyes, according to Charlie. It seems to me some people are always weighing up their options, so why is this less than almost hopeless situation even significant? Something in our lives may be in need of tweaking but . . . Charlie tells us our souls are just possibly in control of that.

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

Moving *Soulard's Notebooks* about Au Bon Pain Cafe. Nicely shaped essay. When I thought a dirge was coming, you embraced the new. Would like to hear story of “so so high” winter night.

From Charlie Beyer:

Nathan Horowitz, in his piece “Hold On Loosely,” captivates the reader again with his strange

environment, and his quest to become a shaman. It is entrapping to read his thoughts as he moves through this weird landscape, and the little side stories contained within add still more flavor to the narrative. I am always expectant and anxious to read the next edition.

This issue's photographs are magnificent. The colors are rich and the subject matter is compelling and curious all at once. Well done and delightful.

From Judih Haggai:

Beach image on page 52 [by Kassi Soulard]:

I can't begin to say how much I need this image. My head is just too jam-packed.

It's a big holy day here in Israel for those who believe in a deity and rules concerning how to behave on this day. Big quiet round here. No immediate sounds of cars, or tractors. Although there were such sounds here on the kibbutz, as fields and livestock don't wait for a calendar day to flip. I have a to-do list that would shake a fakir off his bed of nails.

But all this quiet. I need to walk that beach photo. I need to insert my footprints alongside those left by others. Last night, they were walking the sands in pairs, in groups of noisy drinkers, alone to ponder what life has offered up.

Today, no one. Waves are gently strumming the coastline, no particular anger, no grudge that needs venting, just waves, with the energy of whatever moon phase we've got right now. The colours of sand, water, sky are in pleasant harmony—a simple flow for the eye in need of rest.

Quiet that only an ocean walk can provide. The sweep and flow of waves soothe the breath into effortless inhales, exhales.

This I need. A little while more, or maybe a lot more. I'm here. I'm happy to experience this photo with all its pasts and presents, all good. All lush with salty air and massaging sand.

I'll stick around some more, while I mail this off. Thank you, Kassi, for inviting me here, now.





The Paradox of Hunter-Gatherer Consciousness

[Prose]

Excerpted from The Reality of Hunter-Gatherers, White Poppy Press, 2016.

Lee and Daly define foraging, which is considered synonymous with the term we will be using—hunting and gathering—as “subsistence based on hunting of wild animals, gathering of wild plant foods, and fishing, with no domestication of plants, and no domesticated animals except the dog.” This is, indeed, the most general and succinct way to begin to define hunting and gathering, an approach that surely has some shortcomings (as I discuss below), but that, combined with the following, is quite sufficient despite its simplicity.

As contrasted with their civilized counterparts, hunter-gatherers (HGs) relinquish any notion of control, either over other people or their environment. They do not interfere with the reproduction of crucial species, nor the distribution of food resources, and they famously do not interfere in the affairs of other HGs, respecting individual autonomy as much as any people that has ever existed. Panter-Brick says that, unlike agricultural or pastoralist groups, there is no intentional alteration of the gene pool of any species of animal or plant with which they are in contact.

Clearly, such a definition can be problematic. Lee and Daly note that contemporary HGs have been found to practice a mixed subsistence—for example, gardening in tropical South America, reindeer herding in northern Asia, and trading in southeast Asia and parts of Africa. Furthermore, in practice, Ellen says that things can be ambiguous, such as the notion of “wild” and “cultivated” sago palms in Indonesia or, as Rosman and Rubel note, “wild” and “domestic” pigs in Papua New Guinea. In such cases, “cultivation” or “domestication” does not entail genetic alteration. Such practices may make things more complicated, but they do not detract in any significant way from the working definition I have put forward.

Rowley-Conwy suggest other notable attributes of hunting and gathering that we can consider to add to and refine the definition: little personal property and an egalitarian social system; sporadic gatherings of bands and much mobility of individuals between bands; a fluid organization involving no territorial rights; no food storage; and no group being strongly attached to a particular area.

Along the lines of Morris Berman, I am going to argue here that HGs exhibit a form of awareness that would seem quite counterintuitive to a modern, civilized individual. They do not experience the sacred (if they can be said to do so at all) in the same way that we do; indeed, awareness for them is what I am going to call “horizontal” as opposed to “vertical” (which would describe hierarchical civilized beliefs), the meanings of which words are subtle and should become clearer in time. This horizontal spirituality is, surprisingly to some, actually a secular perspective; it does not involve deities or any kind of formal religion. Berman has called this particular type of awareness *paradox*, and I shall do the same.

Paradox is a diffuse type of primordial awareness that includes being able to hold in one’s mind a pair of opposites simultaneously, as well as the ability to see a discrete point and the surrounding field in the same act of perception. It is difficult to define, because it is a fundamental awareness, but HGs seem to exhibit it, and in the past probably did all the more so—it could be likened to a kind of animism, an awareness of the immanence in the here and now, an affirmation of the sacredness of what

to us is ordinary, day-to-day life.

I would add that this awareness appears to be a relatively heightened one as well. David Peat writes: “The indigenous mind may well be able to tolerate paradox and ambiguity because this order is closer to the inner structure of reality than a more mathematical form of logic.” This dominant mode of consciousness does not involve unitive trance, but a peripheral, diffuse sort of awareness, and is probably a very old genetic memory—in that it seems to be continuous with the kind of alertness animals often display.

Berman writes: “[A]s the word ‘paradox’ suggests, it includes holding contradictory propositions, or emotions, simultaneously; sustaining the tension of this conflict so that a deeper reality can emerge than one would have if one simply opted, for example, for Self or Other.” In vertical (civilized, hierarchical) complexes, no paradox is present; instead, what is often appealed to is “certainty.”

There is a quality here of the universal in the particular (and vice versa) in which the mind is moved “to unfold itself in the space between contradictions.” Paradox involves a moment of suspended animation, a moment of pure “Is-ness” that cannot be circumscribed by any formula or ideology. It is a very different mode of consciousness than the one we are used to. It is not precisely a non-egoic state, although that may approach it, but rather one of, as I mentioned, heightened awareness—there is no boundary loss, bliss, or sacred authority of any kind.

I will say that it is no coincidence that Zen Buddhism has certain definite affinities with the hunter-gatherer psychology. Zen is the practice of discovering one’s true self; before we were tied down by sedentary civilization, and its attendant vertically-oriented psychology, every human experienced the true self of *homo sapiens* all the time. There are enough vestiges of the hunter-gatherer past to enable us to recognize a coherent psychology, rooted in horizontality, immanence, even animism—and they all directly correspond with what is known of the Zen experience. I would also say, however, that we cannot forget that Zen was a product of vertical civilization, so the correspondences, and certainly the context, have to be seen as inexact by comparison.

Hugh Brody, who spent time with native groups in British Columbia, says of them: “Above all they are still and receptive, prepared for whatever insight or realization might come to them, and ready for whatever stimulus to action might arise. This state of attentive waiting is perhaps as close as people can come to the falcon’s suspended flight, when the bird, seemingly motionless, is ready to plummet in decisive action.” Ortega y Gasset also describes the experience: “It is a ‘universal’ attention, which does not inscribe itself on any point and tries to be on all points. There is a magnificent term for this, [namely] . . . *alertness* . . . Only the hunter, imitating the perpetual alertness of the wild animal . . . sees everything.” Walter Ong describes it as a “world presence” rather than a worldview.

In the paradoxical mindset, one is simultaneously focused and non-focused. It is hovering, or peripheral, rather than intense or ecstatic. In such a moment, one feels individual and unique *and* universal, at the same time. Deep connections with other human beings are forged because that which is most personal is also felt to be the most general; and that which is fleeting is seen as that which is most enduring. Tony Hiss states that in this form of perception we are “putting at our disposal an evenhanded, instantaneous, and outward-looking flow of attention, [which] acts like a sixth sense.” When we diffuse our attention and relax its intensity, Hiss says we initiate a change “that lets us start to see all the things around us at once and yet also look calmly and steadily at each one of them.”

So, is this experience one of the “sacred”? The major problem with describing it that way would be that it is largely a product of modern bias. For HG societies there was no separate category of existence for “the sacred.” As Berman argues, spirit, in their eyes, was no more complicated than “water coming off of a leaf, the smell of the forest after rain, the warm blood of a deer.” Anthropologist Paul Radin, cited by Diamond, says of the Winnebago Indians that reality for them was heightened to such a degree that the details of the environment seemed to “blaze.” And this is not a trance experience; there is no loss of consciousness, or “fusion with the Absolute” here. It is immanence, not transcendence; it “involves heightened awareness, not ‘burning bush’ experiences and boundary loss,” writes Berman.

Indeed, for them, the secular *is* the sacred, and it is all around us. This is the primary reason for calling it a “horizontal” reality.

In civilization, with vertical belief structures, and the phenomenon of unitive trance, particular configurations emerge. Erotic energy is re-routed from the environment and channeled into certain experiences that did not formerly have parallel: romantic love, heroism (such as Arthurian legends, the search for the Grail), and the need to go to war. These did not typically exist at all among HGs. Parenthetically, there is also a close relationship here to death, and its attendant attitudes (but more on that later).

Taking the third example, war is chronically irresistible to civilization because it provides situations of numinous intensity such that one is not provided within a sedentary framework—a way of being one with the universe, truly “alive.” There are clear psychological needs that are not met by civilization; HGs typify the role, sociologically and psychologically, from which humans evolved, and it is not surprising that, when people were taken out of that role, psychological aberration ensued.

Thus we call the latter framework “vertical,” with the mundane world being down here, below, and heaven up above. After 1000 B.C.E., this verticality acquired its own dichotomy, creating a sharp division between the sacred and the secular, with salvation being the promise offered, as Eisenstadt and also Cohn contend, by the sacred sphere. By contrast, the HG “religion” was for the most part nothing more complicated than the magic of everyday life. Perhaps the Paleolithic cave painters were simply depicting the energy and aliveness of life, and not mystical trance or oceanic experience. Berman writes: “One does not have to undergo boundary loss to know the sacredness of life.”

In vertical experience, there is a quest for authority and psychic certainty. This was paralleled by the desire of agricultural civilization to possess certainty on other levels as well. Thus, with the rise of sedentary societies, the human race went from paradox—“a kind of kaleidoscopic consciousness”—to fixed systems of religious “truth.” This may perhaps have something to do with the rigid nature of adherence to ideologies of various kinds. During the last four millennia, civilization has been quite preoccupied with transcendence, leading to a kind of certainty in the way we think, live, and act. We take whatever paradigm we live in as real, and can only conceive of escaping that paradigm by replacing it with another. Worship (which can even be secular) continues to be the norm.

It is important to realize that we, who in the present have religion and sacred authority, cannot successfully extrapolate our views and frameworks (and prejudices) backward onto HG societies of the past. In modern times, we tend to equate religion with experience of the sacred, but this may not be a universal relationship. Some societies are capable of having sacred experiences without any sort of religious worldview at all. Some may argue that there had to be, even among HGs, some cultural hedge against death, but what if this weren’t the case?

Perhaps HGs simply regard death as death, not some terribly mysterious and scary event, but rather as one that happens naturally, and does not engender fear. That may be quite difficult for some of us to imagine, but it does appear that contemporary HGs have such an attitude. Balagangadhara argues that it is not the case that HGs would have had to invent a god or transcendent realm simply because we do. Indeed, shamanism is a category that is often quite confused and in reality cannot even be defined. Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey write that shamanism “is more of an exotic essence, a romanticized inversion of Western rationalism, than a scholarly category that can stand up to any sustained interrogation.”

Berman says that “classic HG alertness . . . consists mostly in a sense of the awareness of Presence, of the ‘magic’ that exists in Self being differentiated from Other; of the awareness of Self *as* one is aware of the Other. I put it to you that this *was* HG spirituality, experience of the sacred—a horizontal experience, not a tale of souls ascending to heaven.”

Agriculture and sedentism changed all this. Studies done on HGs versus farmers show that the former are “field independent” and the latter “field dependent.” This reflects the fact that HGs are alert to details, and have the ability to focus narrowly on specific items in the landscape (“field”) even as they

are simultaneously fully aware of the composition of the whole. Sedentary farmers, on the other hand, tend to blur on details and see parts of a field of vision as merged with the whole. Domestication was a major modification here, altering the ability of humans to pay attention. HG societies are marked by an emphasis on focus while domesticated societies are distinguished by an emphasis on the boundary. Indeed, as Berland and also Witkin and Berry note, survival for HGs depends on such a thing: one must be able “to distinguish a bird from its surroundings, the dense foliage of a tree, or to spot a snake several hundred yards away.”

One can see that paradox is a counterintuitive sort of schema, and it may be hard to relate to it because our frame of reference is so totally geared toward religion and vertically-oriented spirituality to mediate our experience of the sacred. Nevertheless, the constellation of consciousness I have described seems to be (in light of available ethnography) quite close to the mark, if a bit difficult to sympathize with for some.

I would like to close with an outstanding description of the essence of paradox as written by David Peat: “The essence of this tribal structuring of time is both eternal and moving. For each dawn is both new and yet the same. In the act of waking to the dawn, the mind is alert to new movements and sensations of a subtle and rapid nature, yet this dawn has a deep unity with every other dawn that is experienced by the tribe. So the birth of the day is both fluid in its movement, and yet part of an eternal order of the tribe. That a moment can be both timeful and timeless appears paradoxical to our own conception of what time should be.”

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* * * * *

Judih Haggai



sleep heals
music heals
gratitude glistens

* * *

silence after dreams
to decipher codes
savour mystery

* * *

morning reminder
we all appear, linger, die
no reason to cling

* * *

wordless history
between tractor trails
old coins and seashells

* * *

mosquito
welcome to our festive meal
but why me?

* * *

singing bowl
some resonate with peace
some cover their ears

* * *

one stolen guava
impossible to resist
the child within

* * *

life in desert
bicycles and four-wheel drive
man-made greenery

* * *

clean sweet bike path
till dreaded tractor
solid wall of dust

* * *

a dream so real
imaginary house
room for us all

* * *

turn around
there behind you
surprise yesterday

* * *

here's a thought
love and accept myself
as i am right now

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

36 Snapshots of 36 Octobers: Who Was I?

Saturday, October 24, 1981 – 2:58 p.m.

Hartford Public Library

Hartford, Connecticut (CT)

—As I told Jenny on Wednesday, after she kissed me on the cheek for the first time ever, the only two things that are important in my life right now are her and my writing. I find myself unable to stop thinking about her. My writing, which in the past 3 or 4 weeks has plummeted to output 0, is slowly picking up. It's been difficult to convince myself that *anything* aside from Jenny is worth thinking about. But now I have to make my writing work. *As well, of course, as finally getting Jenny to love me!*

I came here to write and read. And think about *Jenny!*

Friday, October 15, 1982 – 5:20 p.m.

Aboard West Farms Mall-to-New Britain, CT bus

—I never saw that psychiatrist. But I am going to tell Jenny several things when I talk to her:

1. I'm sorry but I have been rather upset, confused, and lonely lately.
2. I was unfair in my attitudes.
3. I am glad she has new people to talk to, now that she's at college.
4. Our friendship is changing right now. If it survives, it will be all the more stronger.
5. I would like it if our writing collaboration began again.

*If you have something, set it free
If it comes home, it's yours
If not, it was never meant to be*

I am finally going to set Jenny free.

Sunday, October 2, 1983 – 10:30 p.m. (est.)

My Bedroom

Newington, CT

—I was honest with Jenny tonight about how much I am in love with her. That's good. If she never feels a blessed thing for me, at least I have been honest. I don't need to call so much. I don't need to spend money. Just as long as she knows.

Friday, October 12, 1984 – 9:40 a.m.

Central Conn. State Univ. Student Center (CCSU) front lawn

New Britain, CT

—*I think*, I'm not sure, that I'm starting to survive w/o Jenny. I haven't talked to her in over a week. I really do not want to talk to her. Nor see her.

This is a gorgeous fall and I'm taking the time to appreciate it.

Neither Jenny nor school will imprison me na'more.

Thursday, October 3, 1985 – 3:58 p.m.

Hartford Public Library – Reference Room (my table)

Hartford, CT

—*For my college essay-writing class:*

She was short, had copper-colored permed hair. She had on a rain scarf that had variously-sized copper-colored coins printed on its otherwise transparent plastic surface. She wore a beige raincoat that was buttoned up to her throat. Her pants were tan polyester and she wore soiled tennis shoes. Her eyes were clear and light blue. Her skin the color of a ripe peach. Her lips were lightly touched up with pale pink lipstick. In her hand she clutched a wallet whose picture section was folded so her senior citizens identification card was uppermost.

She spoke of working at a thrift shop and said new things were coming in every day so you really had to go there every day to find the good stuff.

She reminded the man that at least he could go out. She knew another fellow who had only one arm and couldn't go out on a day like this one.

They discussed anger and she said she had recently been angered after she had skinned her leg when she fell on a tree trunk downed by the hurricane. It was lying on the sidewalk. She lay there swearing to herself and when some people came along and asked her if she was hurt, she responded that she was only swearing because she'd fallen down.

The man said he would hold his anger inside, gesturing to his chest. The lady replied that holding anger in wasn't good, that it damaged, made soft, something in your brain. Tapped her skull.

The bus stop was a pre-fabricated wooden shelter, recently put up by workmen in the course of an afternoon, and defecated by teenagers that night. Its windows, those still intact, were fiberglass and had various graffiti etched into them. Its floor was cement and furrows of rain ran through it. They also

ran down the deep knife gashes in the window. Beneath the bench that ran its length, one could always find religious tracts and candy bar wrappers.

The shelter was across the street from a seven-story apartment building for the handicapped. It was a graying building whose repetitious front was only varied by whether there was a fan in a given window, a plant, a lamp maybe, or if merely the shade was drawn.

Behind the shelter was a field of sorts, uncultivated, rank with weeds and vegetation. The field sloped gradually up to a ridge upon which sat a hospital.

Just before the bus came, the man told the lady that once, years ago, a painter with one arm had painted his portrait. It was difficult, and took a long time, but he said it was worth it. He didn't know where that painting was now.

Monday, October 6, 1986 – 6:26 p.m.
On board Hartford-to-New Britain bus

—It's becoming increasingly obvious to me that I have to go. I maybe have to leave Connecticut because the writing jobs are elsewhere. I just looked in the *New York Times*—there's jobs for someone wanting to enter the writing field. It's all there. Elsewhere. New York—Boston—Washington—Philly.

Saturday, October 24, 1987 – 10:38 a.m.
Hank's Pub
Boston, Massachusetts (MA)
[day trip from CT with my friend Mark B.]

—A Donald Sutherland movie on the TV in the corner of the natural wood bar that runs at right angle to the front door—

—A man dressed in blue jeans & business jacket arguing with girlfriend on payphone—

—Toward open door to fire escape at back of bar, the Count sits musing, staring aristocratically out the window—

—The bathrooms, on either side of this table, say “Ladies” & “Gents”—

—Old deli case: half-filled OJ jug, old meat, other things wrapped in cellophane—

—“I was gonna buy you a beer . . . too late” says an old eyeglassed guy, wearing a blue shirt with suspenders, to his vague companion—

—The Count gives us a threatening (or is it incoherent?) stare: “I am prepared to tell him that, while he is only a Commodore, I wish him no harm, & I am only here about my business”—

—Working class people on stools—

—Pictures of John Wayne, Kennedy, old Reagan cig ad—

—Cowboy hats on nails—

—Old radiator says: “No comment”—

—Lots of handwritten signs about meals offered—FRESH FROM THE OCEAN—BAKED STUFFED CLAMS 60c EACH—FISH CAKES 60c EACH—

—Santa masks and many ghouls above the bar—

—Sweatshirts for sale—

—Celtics team pictures—beer ads—

—Jukebox only works sometimes—

—and an old man w/an old brown coat & old brown hat emerges into the bar from the downstairs

basement, stops, stares, and says, “If you work hard, you make more money”—turns & leaves bar.

Saturday, October 15, 1988 – 5:02 p.m.

Silver Lane Plaza bus stop

East Hartford, CT

—My mind is still percolating from just seeing *Running on Empty* with Judd Hirsh and, more importantly, River Phoenix—who was also in *Stand By Me*, another movie I barely recovered from.

Wow. What a feeling. Movies don’t do this to me hardly ever.

I have to see that movie again. It was better than any movie I’ve seen this year, excepting a tie w/*Bull Durham*. It beat out *Roger Rabbit*.

I’m stunned. I want to see it again very *very* soon.

Sunday, October 29, 1989 – 1:18 p.m.

My apartment kitchen

New Britain, CT

—Yesterday I met a girl named Kelly during the CCSU Literary Society mountain hike. By the time the Jellicle Literary Guild meeting occurred last night at Roma Restaurant, I was hooked on her completely. I called her ten minutes to midnight and we talked till 1 a.m. I’m going to see her Tuesday night.

I’m not in love—yet. But I’m very close. She drives me crazy. She’s pretty and intelligent and gentle and sensitive and I have been waiting for a long *long* time for her. She is *it*. See? Once I start thinking about it I can’t stop and my emotions and desires stumble blindly ahead of my reason.

I haven’t felt this way in years. And she has no boyfriend! And she’s glad I called her; she was hoping I would.

**KELLY
JENNY
(uncanny)**

I’m ready to love. Ready willing and able. And eager.

Wednesday, October 24, 1990 – 5:30 p.m.

Burger King – corner table

Hartford, CT

[from letter to Kelly now attending graduate school in North Carolina]

—I come here often from work to write, as I have for years, but also to think of you, and the times we sat at this table together. In just 4 days you & I will have known each other for one year. I’m not sure how to react to this. One year. It’s one of those things which is so short and so long at once.

One year ago at this time I was working the cash register at KwikMart, selling cigarettes, lottery, and gasoline, planning to move to Boston with only the vaguest notion of what I’d do there. I was burned out from school, but I was also burned out from 5 months working full-time at KwikMart.

I don't remember with picture-clearness how I saw you at first. It's as though my instinct or subconscious responded first and the rest of me followed. I'll never get over the irony that I was fired at KwikMart November 8th and starting going out with you November 9th.

I was in a fog when you and I started going out. When it cleared, I was not the same—which reason why I cannot clearly remember before.

I hope I've been good for you, Kelly. I care for you so much. In a way, I feel I deserve the distance between us. I lost you in the spring, and therefore the chance to move with you. I never thought you'd give me another chance. When you returned from France, you liked me again. And thus the distance which exists, and all it entails and demands.

Hartford is chilly this evening. The temperature is dropping, the chilly winds blow. Kelly, I've been about this city for over 9 years, from my high school days, college days, worked here in '86-'87, grad school days, KwikMart days, and this last year when you & I went about it and I worked here again.

Someday, this city just a memory for me, I'll return and convulse at how the memories come colliding. Already this city is past/present for me.

My memories are whipping in my face today, tapdancing 'fore my eyes:

*Tell 'em to go away
They say "no, Ray"
We're the way
Like a guitar your psyche we play*

Sunday, October 13, 1991 – 9:25 p.m.

Peoples Donutshop

New Britain, CT

[Tarot Cards: spiritual guidance reading from my friend Mark S.]

Question: Where am I now in developing patience in the situation with Kelly?

Card: 4 of Pentacles: Focus on proper efforts to achieve success in other aspects of life while being patient; I am contemplating impact of relationship between Kelly & another person, considering whether impact of this will turn her back to me.

Question: What do I need to understand about situation between Kelly & me that I'm not aware of?

Card: 10 of Swords: Difficulty in recognizing wisdom in my self, & ability to decide what to do & how to accomplish what is necessary. Don't give up on myself, or consider the situation or other person hopeless.

Question: What's the best way for me to become more trusting of my instincts & emotions?

Card: Ace of Wands: At some point, there will be a number of alternatives presented. Consider each. Choose the one that feels gut-right. Consideration of alternatives will reinforce trust of feeling.

Question: What's spiritual guidance do I need for my future?

Card: 9 of Cups: There are no mistakes in the Universe, & all things work for good. It's easy to look on this time as a mistake, but this is a period where I need a break, & she must realize what she has lost by pursuing something else. Facing this will allow situation to be dealt with in greater equanimity.

Friday, October 2, 1992 – 5:07 p.m.
South Station – concourse
Boston, MA
[from letter to mother]

—Last Friday, Bill Clinton came to Boston to speak at Quincy Market. 45,000 people showed up! I skipped classes at Northeastern & went with my friends Ralph & Gerry, who were both up here visiting me. We maneuvered through the crowd, trying to find a good spot. Ralph led us, promising we'd find somewhere good. We ended up behind a grandstand, which itself was behind the podium at which Clinton spoke. Our consolation was that when he left we 3 were all close enough to shake his hand.

He seems to adore meeting the crowd—has a good, firm handshake, and a warm smile—and reached as far as he could to grip a small girl's hand out thrust to him. Like every special event in Boston, the city went nuts, as a single being it seemed, and the atmosphere was carnival-like.

I deeply believe Gov. Clinton is my generation's Kennedy. He inspires young adults as none have since the '60s. The generation I am an upper-level member of needs this man to convey its vague hopes and fragile idealism into resonating action. If Bush is re-elected President, the collective consciousness of this generation will be *maimed irreparably*. We need a leader to sharpen & direct our focus. I believe Gov. Clinton is the man.

Friday, October 1, 1993 – 2:01 p.m.
On board Boston-to-Lowell, MA commuter train

—Day off from bookstore job and I'm traveling up to Lowell for a 3rd time: 8/22/93, 9/12/93, & now 10/1/93. For what reason? Truth: I like Jack Kerouac's writing, love it at times, even though he is not consistently as great as Salinger and Rilke, and his experiments sometimes fail. Yet his love of English is obvious & true, and his phrases—"Continent of New England" and the nightsky as "Eternity Brunette"—are unique and great.

He is mentor to me, as much for his life as his art—as much mentor as Salinger, Rilke, Baum, Vonnegut, Updike, Milne. Thinking, as he did, of his works as a Proust-like multi-volume single entity makes the most sense in trying to understand them.

I think it also helps me to feel a little closer to my parents, since we are now at a physical distance from each other. Before moving down to Connecticut together, they lived in Lowell, my dad's hometown, for a time, when first married. So I feel connected to Lowell by blood and by Art.

Sunday, October 2, 1994 – 11:24 p.m.
Harvard Square - Au Bon Pain Cafe (indoors)
Cambridge, MA

—Been awhile since a good visit to this joint. Writ journal, read *Globe/NY Times*, some of Brodsky's *Rainer Maria Rilke*. First autumn up here living in this city, not my beloved Boston.

Pretty girl w/lightest of skin, darkest of hair, talking to a bookish young man (who I used to see at Harvard Book Store when I worked there) at the table next to hers. Her moods, breezes, shift several times. Flash of thigh and knee. Bent over into her book. She wants attention, almost desperately. He is shy, smiles mouth closed, shrouds his fluttery gaze into pages. She's attracted to him. He feels more native in books than conversations with pretty girls. He is missing a thousand sweet young girl glances,

coy tilts of head. Now she's going, puckish, defeated. In refusing one possibility, others occur.

Perhaps she was merely testing out her powers to flirt, tease, control, move. Perhaps, short-skirted legs, heavy coated chest, re-entering the evening chill, perhaps forgetting, perhaps forgotten, is off. Perhaps he knew or his books knew and so was so. His thick dictionary is stolid, never varies in its tale. Thighs, female thighs, open, close, flash away, return, damn, bless, swirl, no reason, none.

Wednesday, October 18, 1995 – 10 p.m.
Harvard Square - Au Bon Pain Cafe (indoors)
Cambridge, MA
[from letter to Ralph E.]

—Cities: Hartford was my first, of course. A ragged teen turned within, I adored being anonymous in its crowds—perhaps because I felt so naked in our high school's crowds.

A special morning in that city back in 1981, when I befriended for a few hours a tattered old black man, and helped him send a letter with money to his mother down South. I remember his name yet: John Hudson, lived on Mather Street.

We met while eating breakfast at the counter of a store which is now long gone, and mailed his letter in a post office now long since leveled, and discovered to his chagrin that a lottery ticket wasn't a winner (right numbers, but wrong year) in a gift shop so utterly effaced that I wonder if it really existed.

We parted, friends, never to see each other again. I probably walked over to the library, as I often did. I've thought of him from time to time. I miss him. If death included, in part, the chance to relive that morning, I'd find it blessed justice for all that days I have just damned well simply survived.

Saturday, October 28, 1996 – 9:05 p.m.
Harvard Square - Au Bon Pain Cafe (foyer)
Cambridge, MA
[letter to John B.]

—Day of bookstore labors over, and now here & 1½ hours of sorting through seven MFA Creative Writing program applications. Seven places, in Boston, Amherst, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Iowa, and Stanford, California, for September 1997, almost 3½ years after getting my MA in English at Northeastern U. in Boston!

I'm pointing myself directly at myself, finally; why shouldn't my passion, obsession, be my paying trade as well? It's a risk, but a necessary, sound one. Will any of these places want me? *There's* the question . . .

I recently moved, unwillingly, for lower cost, from Cambridge out to Malden. My commute to work is lengthy, and my time in Boston is now somewhat circumscribed by the clock. But no roommates, and a sane landlord, and a safer environment in a town whose trees are its most attractive presences.

Recently, I tossed back into romance and lust and obsession and loss. One was a work colleague, one night drunk at a bar and tongue-wrestling—that relationship went on awhile, still diminishing now, and I am less crazy as it goes away.

Then I got so sick I couldn't move, and I stayed home for three days, crawling to the bathroom, sweaty nightmares, didn't eat. Boss thought I was faking it—I had to *assert* that I was sick! It's very much time soon to move on from that job.

One way or another, I have to write to live. When not engaged in it, or at least aimed toward it, I sink into a noxious slop. I become worthless. When doing the work, like I've been again more and more lately, however undisciplined I may still be, I nonetheless become a clearing sky, become a star.



Wednesday, October 15, 1997 - 10 p.m.
 Autumns Coffeeshop - My table
 Cambridge, MA
 [Letter to Barbara B.]

-18-

you see, when i am writing my way and the way i know to be most true, i am swathed in the vision, trying to see it with my inner, truer, imagining eye, and make it into words by way of the outer, universal vibrational sound that is ever present everywhere and what disturbs me in the feeble gropers i sit amongst is that they do no such thing why one poor soul say she had to stop attending church so her writing would not be so suffused with Christ, yes, what a terrible thing for one's words to be suffused with, dear Godd, Barbara, i just don't know about all of them but i do know that i live in the universe live and sweating with creation and no such divine madman as Christ would ever go unloved, kicked out, in my I so you see I have to do what I do how i do it no matter what some they think whether they like or dislike i have to do it this way full of empty fields empty roads empty skies overflowing hearts blooming weed prayers i have to walk along as i do hoping that i'm about O S M O to be taken over again, had that is, by what manner of undefinable delight I can never quite define but which means all and all and all to me the light sound & cosmos sound & cosmos LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE

October 31, 1998
 11:30 p.m.
 Bell Rock Cemetery
 Malden, MA.

- Secretly tripping, nobody knows about this one, but I am doing it for my good & everyone else's too—there must be turned on people in this world & more & more of them & each of them must find a place to be to strengthen himself in particular & the population in general

our hope is not just to save ; our restrictive, throttling cultures but to open out to the universe outside of us & the universe within—to realize that there is no difference no separateness that not only are we at home all of the time but everywhere as well & moreover there is no time at least according to our mundane reckoning

Saturday, October 2, 1999 – 3:30 p.m.
Harvard Square - Au Bon Pain Cafe (courtyard – my table)
Cambridge, MA



MAKE
ART
NOW!

another Cenacle
mini-poster brought
to you by Souland
& psychedelics
he he he
..

Saturday, October 25, 2000 – 7:27 p.m.
Central Square - 1369 Coffeehouse
Cambridge, MA
[from letter to Leni R.]

—I was never an alcoholic, unsure if I believe such a condition to be valid, but my thirst for strong drink is all but gone—this same thirst still grips many of my dearest friends—they are surely functioning, intelligent, working adults—good people—but the thirst they have for alcohol is one I no longer possess—3½ years of regular LSD use has vanquished it—nor has one replaced the other—I have no bodily craving for acid—one cannot get “fucked up” on acid—booze softens & clouds—acid sharpens & clarifies—I miss acid after a time because of the wisdom & great self-knowledge it helps me to gain—booze taught me little except how to escape my woes—

Tuesday, October 23, 2001 - 4:49 p.m.
McDonald's near Fanueil Hall - 2nd Floor - My table
Boston, MA

—a sadness, over leaving, not the city per se, but a personal sadness, so many hopes I brought here—expectations, fantasies—so many girls here & I fucked *none* of them—the ones I liked in '92 are now in or near their 30s—

things depart—others come—I need a home again, loved ones nearby—& my Art flaming as always—moreover I need to give of myself to the world to which I belong—Universe my native home—

that's what I think, 9 years into my time in Boston—my last autumn in New England—maybe ever—I don't know—followed by last winter & spring—

I'm sad but hope scratches at me, teases me, shoves me on—a sense of determined fight in me still—having gotten this far, press the fuck on & *make it*, man, *make it!*

Wednesday, October 30, 2002 - 5 p.m. (or so)
On board Seattle, Washington (WA)-to-Portland, Oregon (OR)
Greyhound bus

—Save for a few boxes remaining with my friend Sean up in Seattle, I now fully live in Portland, Oregon—nearly got busted at Seattle bus station for having 'shrooms, surrounded by uniforms, who were checking everyone's bags with War on Terror flashlights & dogs, talked quickly, they were idiots who knew less than they thought.

Lived 28 years in Hartford, 10 years in Boston, 5 months in Seattle, now Portland. Fourth state, third in 6 months, less. It's time I got serious. I live in the Pacific Northwest, & am alone. *Alone*. A few around who care. More pending, I expect. No more living off friends' couches & their money. I have to make my shit work. Portland is where I make my stand for now.

Whatever, if anything, comes, Lisa's hurt me badly. She lied, betrayed, sold me out over & over. There are other girls, at least maybe.

I need a job. I need to build a world. I now live in Portland in a rooming house, weekly rent, a

strange ornate room, sagging bed beneath a chandelier—\$130 rent due every 7th day to stay on—I live in Portland, Oregon, & *this is such a strange feeling—*

Monday, October 13, 2003 - 8 a.m. (or so)

On board Hartford-to-New Haven, CT

Amtrak train

[from letter to KD]

—I’ve been up three hours already since waking in Plainville. Four hours from spare bedroom in my friend Gerry’s house, bus to New Britain, then bus to Hartford, then this train, to my new part-time copy editor’s job at the *New Haven Advocate*. Tired. Yet this is what must be done, & the last 2½ years have humbled me enough to appreciate the work I’ve gotten, the residence I have. Greater ambitions start with gratefulness for small fortunes. I just want to make the day a good one, & get along thereafter.

I have to think: patience. The job isn’t hard, & the people are nice enough. I suppose any new large aspect of life takes some easing into—tub of hot water, inch at a time—I don’t want to be broken again, in wallet & heart—enough already for one lifetime—& I don’t want to forget those days either—

How to live greener—kinder—make better Art—loving wider & more subtly—if time does not heal all wounds, it often dulls & obscures them—one sheds some aches—hope can swim—I love you, Kassidawn—

Friday, October 22, 2004 - 3:15 p.m. (or so)

On board Seattle-to-Bellevue, WA #550 bus

—It’s now six months living back here in Seattle, four with KD, me working at yet another bookstore, trying to make way better these days—

Lisa’s been in touch again, her husband arrested for arson, I didn’t understand the details, & I suppose they don’t really matter. Her life always seems like a crisis—she’s a stranger to me now, & I feel sorry for her, & this really doesn’t sum to very much—

I have poetry to write, & KD to take care of, & have to figure out how to live here in a way that makes worth all the struggles to get to this decent moment—writing, loved, safe little apartment, bound for a job selling books—

Tuesday, October 4, 2005 - 8:04 p.m.

On board University District (Seattle)-to-Capitol Hill (Seattle) #43 bus

—What am I chasing now with my writing? I think it’s power, to shape, create, heal—that was my old chase—power is faith harnessed & accelerating—each one of those elements is like that—a kind of faith to engage a sort of power—

Power—that’s the attraction—is it good? Neutral? It is the answer or near it—I want to create, shape, heal—more than writing—rather, writing empowered by other forces—

Power is ability to affect—that’s what interests me—awareness—affect—

Most don’t think very far into these kinds of ideas—I need to study for affect—what & how—

use it as my verb & PENMAD as its tools—

Psychedelia / Eros / Nature / Magick / Art / Dreams—these are ever my tools—within me and/or available to me—involving others, sometimes people, sometimes the greater world itself—the office jobs I do allow me the somewhat buffer of time to figure these things out—how I write & live my way into these ideas—using these tools—how to do this with KD with me, how to love her with what I am pursuing to know & do—

Wednesday, October 11, 2006 - 8:09 p.m.
Barnes & Noble Bookstore - Basement Cafe
Seattle, WA

—KD suggested last night I call in sick, so I did—we slept till late morning & then went out—record store, so many delicious LPs, then bookstore, a couple of clothing stores—much fun—tomorrow back to the wheel—I feel mostly safe now, but how the world, how reality, constantly shifts—I feel unsafe sometimes I don't know why—

I just want same & steady, demons acknowledged but not overwhelming—I want to grow, not decay—I want to understand & not fear or feel alone—I want peace & ferment both—

If I want Art to so plainly rock me crazy, I have to push deeper into my head, & push my head further into the world—I know this—always works best this way—my Art to chase my fucked up ideas & my good ones too—what this time? I think the past, loss, what sparkles in the ruin—

Art is my obsession—the rest is . . . the rest . . .

The cruelty began as I hit puberty, it was in school & in my neighborhood—& my home-life only getting worse—those old hurts remain & they influence me—what grew up in me to oppose them was Art, which is why it makes me feel good—

So is there any untangling of the years, back to when the hurt & life's possibilities hadn't yet so darkly meshed? Is that possible?

Lisa betrayed me—once she left home, she fucked the first one she met out in the world who smiled at her—just like that—I should have cut ties then but I didn't—it took me two years of ruin to cut them—it died uglier than the rest of my romances—they all died bad—I was so lost then, my life willingly controlled by a girl who even now has no fucking clue what she did to me then—she was my dream—in truth, she was so much less—I hate that thought—

I've wasted so many nights of my life in so many ways—I wish I could do better—

Just head down, keep feet moving—no clear larger picture but make Art—always feels better than not—

Monday, October 15, 2007 - 11:18 p.m.
Portland Towers #16 - couch
Portland, OR

—It was a tiring day, still new to this technical writer job, though I like it much better than what I had in Seattle—it's getting saner—there's respect for me here that I did not get at that other job—I just have to be patient and not stop trying—

And our windows have curtains, red & green ones. They're nice. KD says they make it more homey here.

The years keep their chase, a kind of Beast—The Beast is you & me & everyone—trying to keep the Beast from swallowing me & dragging me back into—*something*—& by *my* will, by *my* doing—How do I do better?

Coming back to Portland after all the pain of poverty & Lisa those years ago—yet I like this city a lot—missed it, *wanted* to return—need to turn my inner tides of doubt & regret—much good & dark in me clashes here—yet when I try—when I make my push—there is good result—I need to believe all this effort will sum—it *has* summed to something, led me, us, back here, familiar, yet new—

Saturday, October 25, 2008 - 11:58 p.m.

CoffeeTime - new armchair

Portland, OR

—*just too fucking high*—What solid ground? Solid ground is want. Always want. And music. And dreams. And nature. And, if ever astray from that, then return.

PENMAD. What else is there?—

- **Psychedelia** - What oncomes, despite.
- **Eros** - Want unsated, by centuries.
- **Nature** - No example, save endurance.
- **Magick** - What wonder in man.
- **Art** - What breaks in music.
- **Dreams** - What hasn't left.

Mortality depends on a degree of selfishness to endure—kindness, when sincere, is offered from strength—*Use* this thinking—but toward what then?

Money is a lie—money crises like these days *are a lie—who gains? Who gains from crisis? Money crises among the elites are to be suspected.*

So ask again: *what mine purpose among men?* I don't know. I don't know toward what end.

Sing. That's all. Unbowed, sing.

Wednesday, October 21, 2009 - 8:46 p.m.

Taco Bell, 21st & Burnside - My table

Portland, OR

—Worked long at *Cenacle* 70 today, it was hard, but I pushed it through & through—KD says I've been often grumpy for weeks—I think she's sometimes right—sometimes I'm fine—

I think I'm more brittle—I feel very vulnerable—job contract near end—the large amount of Art I do & wish to do—I think I can do better & this means work harder & more—

Ground shifts & I have to shift with it—there's no more truth than that—

Friday, October 8, 2010 - 10:59 a.m.

On board Menotomy Rd. (Arlington, MA)-to-Porter Square (Cambridge) #77 bus

—Leather jacket, old jeans & shoes, Lennon-specs glasses, black pens, wallet, book bag, Polly iPod playing '68 Pink Floyd, & a bus through Boston, hair long, face alert & sober looking—that's me now—yesterday crashed, seemed like it was coming—today risen up again—going—

Going to write intensely this weekend—unpacking, job-hunting, has essentially run straight since moving back to Boston in July—so over three months of it—it's a pretty fall day—I'd rather be here than anywhere else—

Saturday, October 22, 2011 - 11:50 p.m.

On board South Station (Boston)-to-Harvard Square (Cambridge) redline train

—*Wow—groovy—wow*—walked through Occupy Boston campsites to an open area for the General Assembly, where a sort of resolution-amendment-commentary thing was going on—then into the camp Library where I donated 12 *Scriptor Press Samplers*, & discussed the word “occupy” with this woman Emily, while cameras rolled—talked a long time with Johnny & Alvaro, up from Occupy Wall Street—sounds more organized there—I'm glad I went—I don't know what next—

Little has been ceded thus far, because little has been demanded—I think the scuffles with police so far, while good to have happened, aren't but prelude—they have violence—we've got brains & public sympathies—guns versus numbers, like always—

*someone gave me a coin—
we occupy
buses broke down—
we occupy
same music, same move of hips—
we occupy
same hard questions—
we occupy*

Wednesday, October 31, 2012 - 7:25 p.m. (or so)

On board Harvard Square (Cambridge)-to-Menotomy Rd. (Arlington) #77 bus

—Notes toward *Tangled Gate* poems:

- Princess Ariadne returns to Island after some years gone—left on another Island with other dancers—the Hero Theseus did this on purpose, but not for reasons she thought—he wanted her to be free to lead the ones he picked away—
- They live on this Island awhile, bond as a group, look to her as leader, eventually they are picked up, she does not say who she was—they travel as a group for a long stretch—some eventually leave her—choose to settle & mate—
- Eventually she & a few or one other come to a hotel—“*For Those Lost*”—& they are taken in as maids—Ariadne begins to dream again, as she had as a child, of the Tangled Gate, which she never entered waking—

- Those running the hotel notice her dreams, decide she is more than a maid—
- She is brought to other part of hotel, given truths of the place, it is for gifted & lost as well as the poor & desperate—
- The dreams lead her back, convince her that the Architect Daedalus is alive, did not drown as his son did in the sea—
- She returns to the Island, it is abandoned, the Castle, her Dancing Grounds—Daedalus's Tower still stands, a magick protected it even as King Minos thought he punished Daedalus by keeping him there—
- She moves in, the Island seems deserted—relives her years learning from him, their love unspoken, how he sent her away—knows of the box of colored threads, which somehow navigate the Tangled Gate, & finds them—
- Decides to enter the Tangled Gate, to find him, she believes he lives, & this is the best chance to find him—
- Loses her years within Gate, finds it in some places ruined—by the years? by the Beast?

There, that's riffings off early morning thoughts—I don't think 36 poems is enough & yet what then?—this is a *Many Musics* project—it stands apart & yet within—I want to embed threads of stories & characters & themes from earlier works—

Saturday, October 5, 2013 - 10:45 a.m.
Central Park - Outside Chess & Checkers House
New York City, New York

—Ate at a nice Italian place called Resette after checking into Club Quarters Manhattan—long time since even passed through this city for a visit—random memories—

High school trip in '81 with French class—don't remember a whole lot but an hour or so in Times Square, back when it was junkies & porn shops, left a big impression—passing through en route to see Kelly down in North Carolina during the first Gulf War around '91, war headlines in all the local newspapers here—seeing The Who rock out *Quadrophenia* with Jim B. summer of '96—the jam band Uncle Sammy at the Wetlands club back in '99, all night bus trip down from Boston, tripping balls end to end—the several Greyhound trips back & forth in early 2000s, to & from Burning Man fest & the West Coast—various trips to the Met, the Guggenheim—now here for MOMA “American Masters” show with KD—

There are people who think much of me &, compared to many, I do more—but that's not my own level of expectation—the fact that I'm still here & who I am & reasonably OK is because I haven't let up—at all—haven't—can't—

I call it following through on all that—like a pitcher's full throw—wind up & deliver—it sounds simple or facile but maybe it isn't—maybe—I don't really know—

But, like Samuel Jackson says in the film *Pulp Fiction*: “I'm trying, Ringo. I'm trying real hard.”

Monday, October 26, 2014 - 8:48 a.m.
Sullivan train station bench - my seat
Boston, MA

—As much as I write, I don't get it all down—I'd have to be copying out everything as it occurs—writing is selective documenting—yet get down this place I pause at frequently, en route to my job's office—

I'm sitting on an wooden bench near the stairway down to the subway trains—bench is scarred & worn yet solid—the flooring here appears to be brick—there are darker colored squares that form a sort of pattern—the floor is worn from endless walking—once in awhile, a transit worker will come around & pick up detritus—there is a wall map between the in-bound train entrance near me, & the out-bound train entrance over there—often people study it—a mechanical announcement says: “The . . . next . . . Forest . . . Hills . . . train . . . arrives . . . in . . . five . . . minutes.” There's an elevator to my right, mostly for handicapped, elderly, & strollers—

Sounds of walking but not much talking as people pass—bodies moving near each other, but not touching, not acknowledging, yet looking, measuring, judging, wondering—

People sit on this bench to wait, come & go—occasionally a small old Hispanic woman is nearby, long jacket, lime-green scarf, handing out Spanish-language religious literature—saying over and over again, “Jesus loves you”—the Hispanic people who interact with her are very nice, sweet, touching her shoulder, smiling—

Thursday, October 8, 2015 - 9:08 a.m.
Sullivan train station bench - my seat
Boston, MA

—Scale this morning read 266.0 lbs, which is just amazing to me, given that I was at 277 in late August—choosing health via diet & exercise program, using the FitBit tracker watch to count calories & steps—is as much a mental choice as a physical one—I say this as an old crooked balding man limps by to the stairs—it helps KD too, & that's what matters—

I've never been a healthy eater, an exerciser, at a good weight, but I don't want to fall down like my old friends Jim B. & Mark S. did, & not get up again—I've been watching people all day, bodies slender & heavy—I'm the latter, long have been—trying this out, getting healthy, committing to it no shit, is new to me—to pull together diet & exercise in a way that is comprehensive, driven by statistics-influenced behavior—

I don't have a choice.
I don't want to fall down.
I don't want to die of self-neglect.

Doors open by acts of faith & hope.

Thursday, October 27, 2016 - 1:59 p.m.
 Bungalow Cee - Office desk
 M—, MA

—So this is the 36th entry of this piece, written after several days of sitting in this nice office, in KD's & my nice little house, culling the 35 others, & typing them out. Written before this piece as a whole is edited, smoothed, given its own best coherence.

It was an intense experience, reading through my yellow Thoughts Pads from the last 36 years. How I have changed. How I have not changed. I started this "on the road" journal project on May 2, 1981, & passed 500 filled pads this past August. What to do about this milestone? The idea came together slowly.

So decided to reach all the way back to 1981, when I was 17, & visit my self every October since. See where I was, how I was, what I was doing. *Who I was*. Create a kind of composite story. Not a complete one. But more like a representative one.

Try it yourself sometime, with whatever materials for remembering you have in hand. You are who you were. And you're not too.

 10/27/2016

* * * * *





Colin James**Fat Shame**

The obese
trick you into
thinking they
are your friends
waiting while you
become more fragile
toss you down
some stairs into
a damp cellar
where you survive
eating spider eyes
until you are rescued
by tall thin people.

* * *

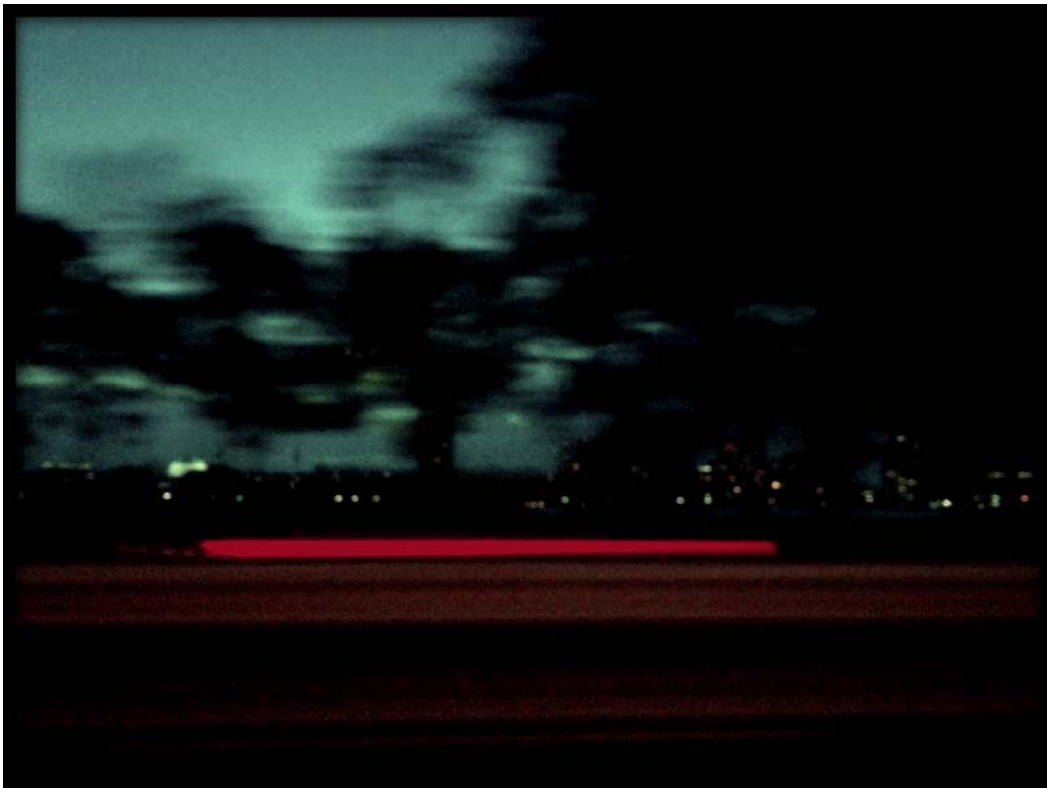
Establishing, Then Severing, All Communiques

I carried a cute little birdhouse
with a retractable bobbing head
not everywhere but to dubious locals,
roadhouses mostly, and seedy atmospheric dives.

No one commented on my traditional white t-shirt,
but many patrons walked up real close,
adjusting their angles of observation
back and forth, up and down,
until a consensus was achieved.

Pride is a dangerous word,
& being kicked to death by a stranger
fantasy no longer seemed so absurd.

* * * * *





Jehrico Finds a Mistress

[Fiction]

*From Jehrico: Eleven Stories of a Mexican Boy Making His Way in the Old West,
Hammer & Anvil Books, 2016.*

Jehrico knew what he was, and right from his first pick-up, a token-type horseshoe. He was a collector of things tossed aside, and Jehrico assumed that the Indian woman he was looking upon had been thrown aside, like so many of the tossed parts he had retrieved, and made something of in his foraging about the Old West. Which was, indeed, his land of discovery and recovery. In fact, the token-type horseshoe, at his insistence, was made into a Bowie knife by a Mexican blacksmith whose father had fought at the Alamo, and came away with stories of Jim Bowie.

Unwittingly he had started his small business with that token-type horseshoe.

As for the Indian maiden, Jehrico made his pronouncement early. “She is the most beautiful maiden I have ever seen, ever been around.” It was Jehrico’s voice coming along a windswept passage in the Randolph Mountain Range. He was not talking about Lupalazo, his wife, or his oldest daughter, Kerradina, a beauty in her own right, and he was not talking to anybody but himself, and a piece of the wind that would keep his secret locked in the clouds, and the high mass of rock lifting his eyes to the blue sky . . . at least for the time being.

“I will not buy her if she is possessed now, because she must be free in my mind, as well as her own mind. But I will trade for her. That is my custom.” The junkman and salvager of the West had not let go of the talismans, the many of them, that brought him luck, or the goodness borne in what God designed, and in what man made and then discarded.

And at the moment his eyes were studying another ghost town he had come across, the dust of the years blowing into the wind, to be grasped, run through the sieve of his mind for what he now called “salvagations.” He had coined his own word for what he accomplished over the years. His friend Collie Sizemore probably had some influence on the coining.

This maiden was part of the old building, for the knotted rope binding her to a beam was thick as her wrist, solidly in place, not eaten by time or vermin of the ghost town, a prisoner of the knoter, whoever that might be. He had seen no other person, and heard no other sound but her moaning.

Surely, though, someone was about, someone who would not let go of this beautiful creature, who had her hog-tied to a beam she could not break down or carry on her back.

In the rear of this decrepit building, partially blowing in the wind, part of its dust making the last journey through creation, he’d found her. There was a moan riding an edge of the wind, a human in distress, and Jehrico made his way into and through the shanty-like building on its way to history. Rubble was everywhere, a mess of furniture and various implements, artifacts of a once-livable site, sitting in the last place they had been used, wrecked by time, twist, or toss. But every article he spotted worthy of description and identification was slowly sifting through his mind.

He was at work, and at rescue.

Jehrico, once called by Collie Sizemore as the “razor appraiser,” carried only his sharp eyes and a rugged cudgel, a hand-fashioned weapon to ward off the first wild animal to set upon him. He had never used the cudgel for a weapon, but rather to thrust found things aside, into better view, to see what they were made of, what they had left in them, what they might become.

The stories of things he had “turned over” had assumed a legendary status, consisting of so many invaluable finds that truth built upon itself, for many believed what he had not yet found would come to his hand, without doubt, before it blew away into dust. Collie also said, “Jehrico is a savior of all things found, and leaves no life left on the ground.”

There were folks in Bola City who swore Sizemore worked out of some book that Jehrico had found along the way, in a deserted Conestoga or a fallen schoolhouse, who preached what he read.

Collie, one of his first friends, had become proficient in spreading his status in the West, the way his words seemed fashioned solely for Jehrico Taxico, Collector. “Don’t leave it, he’ll retrieve it.” “Don’t toss your tool, you’ll look the fool.” “Don’t fling-off old gimmicks, he’ll make ’em do tricks.”

Jehrico, it was also known, had never carried a firearm to protect himself. Excelling in bartering, in trading up or down for some target piece he noted still locked into original form, into its first intent, he followed the moaning that issued from the nearly-collapsed building in the sixth ghost town he’d come upon. Each sound, each sigh, each throaty call for help, drew him through the wrecked building, which he assumed even animals stayed clear of.

When he caught sight of her, standing in a shaft of sunlight dancing around her, his breath came to a halt, balled up in his chest, collected itself for a gasp noting pleasure without touching. She was absolutely beautiful in her horrible state. Her clothes, what was left of them, were shredded, tattered, but in such a haphazard manner they had left her as a most desirable woman, beautiful, wanton, dressed for company, undressed for company, exhibiting the shapeliest torso from hips to shoulders and slung with an obviously prominent bust, the finest and firmest of legs and arms, the perfect face of a woman of the West, her moans ascending the loveliest of throats, coming past a perfection of pale lips, sitting on his ears like a psalm of sorts, a prayer of thanksgiving before Jehrico could contemplate or conduct her rescue.

“What will I do now?” he asked aloud, in the midst of dust, danger, and derring-do. He had to release her from bonds, cover her, see who had imprisoned her in this dangerous site, and engineer a trade. He beheld a vision of Lupalazo, when he had first seen her with the Indian he eventually traded with, and now envisioned Lupalazo looking over his shoulder, and fully noting how he viewed this new beauteous maiden of the West, this prisoner. Of all people, Lupalazo would know the unsaid that was being said, the feelings that were conjured, the minute joy being thrust into play.

This new woman of the West was easily the most handsome and beautiful he had ever seen. She was not an artifact, not something to improve, alter, absorb into some new element. She was perfection, unalterable, inalterable. He dared not close his eyes; he was concerned, afraid, disturbed by what he might do, hope for, end up with.

Then he realized she had not spoken a word, uttered only the moans of imprisonment, the pain of roped limbs, but she raised her eyes and stared off to her left; she was alerting him to something, someone. Her eyes squinted tightly, and her jaw dropped slack. Fright broke out on her face, her mouth atwitter, her eyes begging salvation.

Jehrico grasped his cudgel tighter, swung around, and saw two Sioux Indians standing at the door behind him, one with a lance, one with an arrow in his bow. Neither one carried a stone ax or a long knife.

Jehrico screamed the name “Wakan-Tanka!”—one of the gods of the Sioux he was familiar with—and then he swung the cudgel and hit above his head a cross-piece running across the room. The walls of the old decrepit building shook dust from secret places, echoed along other sections of joists and beams, shaking the whole building. The two Sioux dropped their weapons and stood entranced in place as Jehrico held out one hand in a sign of peace, even as the shaking of the old structure slowed down, and ceased. He showed no scowl on his face, or any part of a smile, neutral for the moment.

But the next move was Jehrico’s and he knew it. Withdrawing his Bowie knife, he cut the bonds off the woman, knelt down in front of her, took her hand and held it on his head for a second, stood up and said again, in his most solemn voice, “Wakan-Tanka. Wakan-Tanka.” He wondered what

the pair of them looked like, her in her tattered clothes that showed most of her body, him with a mighty cudgel in hand and saying the name of one of the Sioux gods.

Then Jehrico, not through any bartering as yet, made another strange move; he flipped the cudgel in the air, caught it coming down at its thickest end and held the handle toward the Sioux. Both Indians stepped back, refused to grasp the cudgel, and fled the building without their weapons, the god's name leaping from their throats, "Wakan-Tanka! Wakan-Tanka!" From the dusty, barren road for more than a half-mile he could hear their cries as they carried off fear and surprise in departure.

It was not his old pal Collie Sizemore who first saw the strange pair coming into Bola City, Jehrico leading his mule and a lovely Indian maiden, blanket-wrapped, sitting on the mule as though she owned it, her eyes looking straight ahead into the center of town. But it was Lupalazo from the porch of their home who saw them. The maiden did not see any of the men eventually staring at her, but saw Lupalazo and three children clutching at her knees while staring at the man with a strange woman on his mule, a sight they had never seen.

But it was Collie Sizemore, ever alert, who saw them next, who yelled it out, "See what Jehrico brought home now. She's a beauty, a bubble of trouble does appear the way it looks from way off here."

The saloon emptied into the street to see the sight. There was noise galore, roaring guffaws, and *aws* and *ahs*, as the crowd looked upon the Indian maiden when the blanket fell away from her loveliness.

"Did you dig her up from one of those holy places, Jehrico?" Collie yelled out. "She looks goddilly and quite bodily. And your wife is bound by strife."

There was laughter and wonder and daydreaming galore as Jehrico threw the blanket back onto the maiden still sitting on the mule. Lupalazo smiled, knowing her man, throwing Collie Sizemore a quick look of condemnation for his remarks, but allowing a smile as punctuation, knowing what and who Collie was from near the beginning.

One of the older patrons of the saloon, who had heard or seen Jehrico at bartering before, asked, "What'd you give up for her, Jehrico? You still got all your arms and your legs."

Collie Sizemore had to laugh at that one, and snapped his fingers in joy, and then Jehrico said, "I only had to use the bait of one of their gods for a couple of Indians." He threw his head back, his mouth open, as if to show shock of some kind.

"Which one was that?" asked the old man, as though he was plumb familiar with the whole tribe of gods that ran the heavens above.

Jehrico said, "Why, Wakan-Tanka, of course,"

The old patron of the saloon simply said, as he turned and looked out over the congregation of drinkers, his eyes finally back settling on Jehrico, "Oh, that one. Serves him right getting used up like that. You're still ahead of the game, Jehrico. Gotta hand it to you." He slapped his thighs with both hands.

All of them, including Collie and Jehrico, gave the old man credit with heavy laughter; it was loud and lush and long. But it was Lupalazo, the Collector's wife, the mother of his six children, who threw her arms around the still-frightened Indian maiden and said, as she ushered her away from the crowd, "Come along with me, dear, and we'll get you cleaned up and into a proper outfit. Something special for what you've been through, something right out of my own collection, something a little more attractive for you."

Looking back over her shoulder, she added, to one and all, "You will be welcome as mistress of our household, and then we'll see who wants to venture close to an Indian maiden."

She was sure Jehrico understood every word but, just in case, she said it again in her own tongue, with no twist in the meaning, "*Le dará la bienvenida como maestra de nuestro hogar y, a continuación, vamos a ver quién quiere aventurarse cerca de una doncella India.*"

The Master Collector of Junk understood every word, in both languages and, for sure, the full intent.

* * * * *





Reflections in the Mind's Eye

[Travel Journal]

"Higher up, further out," the old man urged from below. "The fresh ones, the little ones." I stretched, and plucked them, spear blades of green light against the blue equatorial sky.

Dave Sternstein and don Joaquín and I were gathering the ingredients. The drinker had chopped pieces of a thick, old yagé vine, then sent me up a tree after leaves from a yagé oco vine he'd planted at the base. He left to do some work back at his hut. Five meters up, on swaying branches, I filled a bag with leaves, while below, Dave cut a yard-long, flexible piece of wood, and tied a length of fishing line to it to make a musical bow to play later on during the ceremony.

As Joaquín had said, Dave was Jewish, but he knew little about Judaism, his parents having rejected much of their heritage. Dave and his sister had been raised in Ecuador and Northern California. He'd met Joaquín a year after I had, and the two had hit it off.

Dave and I brewed the yagé over a fire in a small clearing near Cabaña Supernatura. Two Y-shaped vertical sticks supported a third horizontal stick from which hung a four-gallon aluminum pot filled with chopped and pounded yagé vines, yagé oco leaves, and water. Beside the boiling pot of yagé, I told him Bible stories. About Abraham, who smashed his dad's idols. About Isaac, to whom little happened after Abraham nearly cut his throat with a stone knife.

"I had an Uncle Isaac," Dave said. "Never met him. My granddad's brother. Split Europe a step ahead of the Nazis and worked as a boxing promotor in Cuba!"

"And then there was Isaac's son Jacob," I went on, "who fell in love with a girl named Rachel, worked for her dad for seven years, and got tricked into marrying her big sister Leah. Then Jacob had to work seven more years to marry Rachel."

Dave said, "Dude, the Bible's like a friggin' crazy soap opera!"

"Yup. So Jacob had twelve sons by those two sisters, and the sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. 'Israel' was a nickname that Jacob got. One time he camped on top of a mountain. An angel or an emanation of God came to him in the form of a human. The two of them wrestled all night. Neither one could win. At sunrise, the stranger just touched Jacob's hip and dislocated it, and then said, 'Let me go. The sun's up. I gotta be on my way.' Jake was like, 'Not until you bless me.' And that angel or emanation or whatever gave him the name Israel, which means 'Wrestles With God.' That's what the people of Israel are: Godwrestlers."

Dave replied with myths of hunters and forest spirits while the pot bubbled and steamed. For much of the past five years he'd lived with Quichuas and Waoranis, helping get legal titles for their territories and studying their plants. He'd drunk ayahwasca as a student of a Quichua shaman named Ignacio Chimbo. He'd even spent a lot of time with Nenke, the Waorani shaman Jeremy Carver had told me about, and whom I'd seen on the Cononaco River a couple of years previously.

Broad-shouldered and wiry, Dave had dark eyes in a narrow face under a crown of black curls. When he walked, he leaned back. He was only twenty-four, but his hands were rough and skillful from manual labor. He was at home in the forest. A born leader, I thought. He could've been the biblical David himself, leading his cat-and-mouse guerrilla war against King Saul from his wilderness fastness. Dave's enthusiasm was contagious. "I'm here to take a stand to help save the planet," he told me as he put another log on the fire. "There's nothing more important."

Nearby, a stick cracked. Then another. We looked up. Rufino's three black-and-white cows

were at the edge of the clearing, having slipped out of their enclosed pasture near Joaquín's old house. They were here to raid the sugarcane and other crops. We grabbed sticks and yelled at them and chased them away. Joaquín's skinny hunting dogs Cuauquillo and Potente helped us, barking and snapping, but they were actually a bigger problem than the cows. Joaquín had told us dogs contaminate the space where yagé is brewed: their energy being harmful to the yagé's energy, they needed to be kept away.

The dogs allowed themselves to be driven off. The cows, though, were imperturbable. They came three more times and we chased them away three more times. They'd run away only until they were out of our range. Then they'd stop, turn their heads, and stare at us calmly, chewing their cud as if mouthing the words "Fuck you" over and over. We could yell and keep on chasing them, but as soon as we stopped running, so would they, and when we turned our backs, they'd follow us, perhaps immediately, perhaps not, but in any case, just as soon as they felt like it.

Dave and I mooted esoteric interpretations of these invasions. The cows were evil spirits. Or good spirits testing us, like Zen masters. Maybe all evil spirits were good ones in disguise.

"Thank you, Jehovah," Dave prayed, leaping to his feet again and grabbing a stick, "for these friggin' cows!"

Sticks were the only things we had to throw at the beasts, as there were no stones in the area. But it's nearly impossible to cause a reasonable amount of pain to a cow by throwing a stick at it.

So we kept having to chase dogs and cows away. The two tame peccaries also invaded our airspace, which wasn't a problem from a ritual point of view, but they were incredibly rank-smelling. Their presence further disrupted the meditative calm which Dave's teacher Ignacio Chimbo said was the ideal state in which to prepare yagé.

Around four in the afternoon, Joaquín called, "*¡David!*"

"*¿Qué pasa?*" Dave called back.

"A snake biting a neighbor from across the river. You helping with that machine you having."

"I'll be right there," Dave hollered, standing. To me, he said, "I'll go help out. I got this snakebite zapper with electricity. Supposed to break the chains of the molecules of the toxin. I know this Waorani snakebite remedy I can brew too. Joaquín has the plant. You keep the yagé going, OK?"

"Got it covered."

An hour later Joaquín came to tell me the three of us wouldn't be able to drink that evening, what with the chaos of dogs and cows and the emergency.

I let the yagé boil a while longer, then took it off the fire, which was dying down. With a pair of sticks I fished out most of the plant matter and discarded it. Leaving the pot, I headed back to Cabaña Supernatura. At least I could have something to eat and drink.

The season to pick coffee beans had begun that morning. Radio Sucumbios had been reminding harvesters for several days to watch out for snakes. The patient was Aguilar, the mestizo shopkeeper who lived just upriver on the other bank. He'd been picking coffee beans behind his house. A little green snake had been resting, coiled, on a leaf, matching its color. So Aguilar lay in a chambira hammock in the family hut next to Cabaña Supernatura, his throbbing, blackened, swollen arm cradled in a sling. From time to time he zapped the arm with Dave's device—which looked like a yellow electric razor—and sipped from a gourd of the bitter infusion Dave had brewed. Aguilar's father, visiting from the coast, was bedding down on a mat on the floor nearby.

The younger Aguilar was wiry, mustached, hawk-nosed, with a blue-green tattoo of a cross on his skinny chest. I knew him from his store. He and his wife had migrated to the jungle fourteen years earlier with fifteen other families from the southern province of Loja. Now, together with their three kids, they ran a general store on the second floor of their house. Their front yard was a volleyball court frequented by other settlers. Joaquín called Aguilar "brother" when he shopped there. The Secoyas frequently voiced their opposition to colonists—poor people from Ecuador's coastal cities who invaded unsettled land with the government's tacit or explicit permission. Although, on principle, the Secoyas resented the presence of those people, in part because they were killing off the wild game, they were

often fond of the colonists as individuals.

The next morning, the patient went back home across the river, but he returned in the early afternoon because the pain was so bad. His family stayed at his place, warily harvesting coffee beans, so he was alone and had little to do. I gave him the Spanish-language *New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs* that Greg the missionary had given me up in San Luis Potosí. Dave and I went back out to boil down the yagé from three gallons to one.

Once the fire was going with the pot of yagé suspended above it, we sat crosslegged on broad banana leaves and relaxed. Some branches of a tree reminded me of Hebrew letters. I said, "There's this idea in Jewish mysticism that everything that exists is God's language. The mystics looked at that one passage in Genesis where it's like, 'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.' And the mystics were like, 'Aha! Everything that exists is made of God's language.'"

Dave said, "Wicked! Check this out." He flipped through a dog-eared copy of Terence McKenna's *Archaic Revival* and read aloud, "I don't believe the world is made up of quarks or electromagnetic waves, or stars, or planets, or any of those things. I believe the world is made of language."

"Belief is powerful," I said. "I believe I'm going to try a cup of this brew."

I dipped a cup into the steaming brown liquid, let it cool, said,

*Blessed art thou,
O Lord our God,
King of the Universe,
Who has created the vine, amen,*

—and drank the divine language, rich and bitter like the fruit of the tree of knowledge itself. I stood up with a grimace. I observed the linguistic surroundings, the lang-scape. Beneath a tree made of language, I found a twig bearing dried leaves that in their drying had curled up like withered brown hands. I sat down with the twig for further study. I noticed that the leaves were teeming with a miniscule language of black ants. In a little nook, a cave-like fold of leaf, was a hunting spider like a tiny gray monkey with too many legs and eyes. We stared at each other until we lost our fear. When I turned my head to say "Dave, look at this," the spider jumped onto the hair on my chest, explored for a moment, jumped on the ground and was gone.

I picked up Dave's paperback *Field Guide to Tropical Rainforest Mammals* and opened it at random to a page on which were drawn the heads of many species of bats. I wondered about the bats' role in the local shamanism, and whether, as spirits, they were friendly or unfriendly, good or evil. Some looked wise and kind—others, less so. The vampire bat looked malicious, diabolical. Why? And what are animal spirits, anyway, if they exist? What relation do they have to the physical animals, and to evolution?

Rain started falling. From trees, Dave and I hung two overlapping sheets of plastic and sat beneath them, trading myths, breathing smoke, keeping the fire alive.

He said, "Do you know the Secoyas' origin myth?"

"No."

"Check it out. At first, humans lived underground, and they had tails. They ate nothing but various kinds of clay. One day God lured them up to the surface with some palm fruit, and as they came out of a cave, one by one, he ripped their tails off and tossed them away, and the tails turned into monkeys! Each tribe's tails turned into a different species of monkey. Secoyas' tails turned into woolly monkeys. Waoranis' tails turned into spider monkeys. White people's tails turned into chimpanzees, and black people's turned into gorillas. See, when the Secoyas met white and black people, they integrated them into their myth! The cave was in Peru near the Santa María River. There's a particular place where it supposedly happened. Rufino showed me on a map."

"That's cool," I said. "Do you know the origin of the Norse runes?"

“Uh-uh. What is it?”

“The gods were really messed up—they were going hungry, they needed some power, some magic. So Odin goes out to Yggdrasil, this giant ash tree, the biggest tree around, and he hangs himself upside down in it, and cuts himself with his spear. He stays there, fasting, for nine days and nights until he suddenly sees the runes surging up out of the earth to him. He’s like, ‘Aha!’ He cuts himself down. That’s how runes came to people, through Odin’s vision quest. People used them for spells and for writing. It was basically a shamanic initiation to get them. A controlled near-death experience that led to a vision. I read in a different book that Inuit shamans initiate students by holding them underwater until they nearly drown, then bringing them back up.”

“Yagé can be a kind of near-death experience too,” said Dave.

“Right on,” I said. “So that tree Yggdrasil plays another role in the Norse myths, as the axis of the world. Its roots reach down into the underworld, and its branches touch the sky. This dragon called Nauthig gnaws on the roots. When he kills the tree, the universe will die.”

“Long may the tree live,” Dave said. Out of his bag, he took a pouch of American Spirit tobacco and, using a half-dry banana leaf, he rolled himself a cigar. Humming, he pulled a stick out of the fire and lit the cigar off its ember. *Puff, puff*. . . his thoughts were elsewhere . . . the smoke glided away and was lost in the rain.

For two hours, the rain drummed on the plastic sheets over our heads. Then the clouds cleared.

At sunset we strolled back to the cabin, bringing the warm jug of yagé, and we gathered what we’d need for the ceremony. We made mamecócós by cutting the plants and bundling their stems with twine, leaving the tongue-like leaves free to rustle. In the cabin I hung up hammocks for Dave and Joaquín and me. As I was making mine fast to a roof beam, a bat flew by, brushing my hand. I thought: *That’s funny. I’ll have to ask Joaquín what that means.* I felt a mild sting: the animal had touched me with a claw.

As if on cue, the black dog, Cuaucuillo, jumped up onto the floor of the hut, where he knew he wasn’t supposed to go, and trotted around, wagging his tail, daring me to try something. I chased him off twice, then smudged the area with a bundle of sage I’d brought from the States. Wafting the smoke around, blowing it, marking a sacred space. Keeping demons away. A game of Let’s Pretend for grown-ups. Cuauqui kept his distance.

Dave came back from the family hut with the news that Joaquín would join us around midnight. Dave and I painted red designs on our faces with achiote. He added Waorani zigzag designs representing lightning to his arms. I added Norse runes to the backs of my hands, Algiz for protection and Ansuz for vision. We were ready to go. As night fell, we lit a kerosene lamp and poured our first cups of yagé.

I intoned, “Great Spirit, please bless this ceremony. Show us good, strong visions. Grant us the power to heal ourselves and others.” I choked down the lukewarm brew.

Dave proclaimed, “Eyes of the divine immortals, gaze upon my heart and reflect my devotion to the truth. With this drink I seek to connect myself with the highest, bravest, and most virtuous powers in the universe. I dedicate this drink and this ceremony to their greatness!” He blew on the surface of his yagé and then, without pausing, drank the liquid to the dregs.

Whether a short time or long time passed, no one knows, but then Dave was murmuring a melody and my visionary capacity clicks on like a TV set. Thin white lines fan out in the darkness—eldritch gossamer, psychic spider-silk, faerie axons linking the world into a macro-mind. I’m listening to Dave and watching the lines, when *Bam!* the face of a giant bat appears right in front of mine, very detailed, extremely real—bared fangs in its open maw, a leaf-shaped nose, huge ears, glossy eyes staring into my soul.

Dave told me Ignacio Chimbo told him, “If something scary appears, sing and it’ll disappear.” So I sing,

*Hee-ye-hey, hey, ya-ha-ha,
hey, hee-ye-hey, hey, ya-ha-ha.*

The vision doesn't disappear. The face doesn't move a muscle. But the terrifying snarl is now a broad grin. I grin back. I begin to have a bat trip. The bat spirit transmits bat thoughts to me, bat ideas, bat language.

"There's no need to be afraid of the dark," he advises. "Fear of the dark is a weakness you humans have."

"All right."

"It's OK to be upside-down. We bats sussed it out long ago. It's no big deal."

"Cool."

"We get a kick out of scaring humans for the fun of it. We just have to fly around, and you scream. You-all are easy to scare. Especially women."

"Good to know."

"And, finally, we experience many different kinds of love."

With that, the face vanishes. For a moment, I'm flying in the body of a bat in a cave filled with many others. Then I'm back in the hammock.

Earlier, I wondered whether bats were good or evil omens. Now it's obvious it depends on the species, the community, the individual. Bats have their own myths, traditions, politics. At least, those are the human words that come closest to what they have.

A song comes to me:

*Bat love is so wild,
Cloud love is so mild.
Cloud love is so wild,
Bat love is so mild.
The clouds are so high. The valley's so low.
The birds are so high. The mice are so low.
Mice love is so low, hey, hey, hey, hey.
Bird love is so high, hey, hey, hey, hey.
What do you know? You coming to see the show?
What's under the snow? What's under the snow.
If you wanna see the show, it's under the snow.
Purple flowers appearing,
green, green grass is appearing.
Purple flowers appearing,
green, green grass is appearing.*

I tell Dave about the visions and wonder whether what I saw was "a bat spirit," or "the bat spirit," or the spirit of that particular species. Dave's not sure either.

Outside the hut, the patch of night sky fills with black, shiny eyes, a visitation of bodiless beings from outer space come to take a look at us, curious about a pair of humans beginning to learn to see with their minds.

Looking around with my mind at what humans call the spirit world, I see an infinite ecosystem populated by infinite species of beings. The place is so huge you might never see members of the same species twice. Unencumbered by matter, they shape-shift and move fast. Simultaneously, amid that chaos, particular spirits and groups of spirits associate with certain groups of humans over time. Like the gods, like Thor who visited the first time I drank. And the spirits of the aná, the plumed-and-cascabelled magic wands of the Cora shamans in Mexico, which are, at the same time, doctors, hawks,

and rattlesnakes, and which bring energetic medicines of the earth and air.

My vision drills into the ground beside the hut. Warped, fanged, spiky humanoids are walking around down there. One, pale and muscular, is sucking energy out of Aguilar with a gray magnetic beam that comes out of its hands, face, and chest, and rises up through the ground to connect with the man sleeping in the other hut. It used the snake as a mouth to strike our neighbor and begin to feed off him. I watch this predator. It can't see me. I analyze it, assess its strength. I want to attack it, drive it away. But it's underground: I can't reach it.

Of course those things have to eat just as we do. To counteract them would be to disrupt the cosmic balance. But we work on behalf of the humans. And there's no cosmic balance or imbalance, only flux, only change, only whirling energies. That's how it looks from here, as I stare into the swirling air.

What the shamans believe is true: disease is attack by invisible predators. The breast cancer that strikes women in my family, for instance. What we call disease is the perceptible dimension of the strike. Behind it is a hungry demon, gnawing, feeding—a lamprey that bears the sun in its gut, so that, in dying, we're sucked into fire and light. A terrible gateway to infinity.

A “demon” is whatever preys on *us*.

Dave interrupts my thoughts. “Did I tell you about Wepe? No, right?”

“No, please do.”

“He's a Waorani elder. Lives in the village of Quehueri'ono, where I was three years ago. His name, Wepe, means blood. He told me about this thing that went down twenty-five years earlier. A missionary from the United States persuaded some Waoranis in another village to convert to Christianity. One of the converts, a guy named Humberto, showed up in Quehueri'ono with short hair, really fine city clothes, and a fat gold watch on his wrist, and started tryin' to convert people. Wepe got in his face and yelled, ‘You're not a Waorani! Where's your long hair! Where're your ears?’ All Waorani guys back then used to pierce their ears and stretch the lobes way out and put balsa-wood disks in them. ‘Where're your ears?’

“Humberto said not all Waoranis pierced their ears or wore their hair long anymore. Something new was goin' on! There was a new way of living in the world, and God had come to earth and died so all people everywhere could be saved from Hell!

“Wepe looks at him and goes, ‘You're talkin' shit! You're not one of us! You're a demon!’

“Humberto's like, ‘No, I'm a Waorani like you. And I'm here to tell you God loves you.’

“Wepe goes, ‘Well, if you're a Waorani, you'll know how to make a good spear.’

“Humberto's like, ‘I know how to make a good spear.’

“So they took machetes and an axe and went into the forest. They came to a chonta palm tree. That's what the Waorani use for their spears. It's a food plant—it has fruits—and it's also the hardest wood in the forest! So Humberto cut the tree down with Wepe watchin' him. Humberto started makin' a spear, but Wepe didn't like how he did it. Wepe's like, ‘You fuckin' demon! That's not how a Waorani makes a spear!’ He picked up the axe and split open Humberto's back and killed him. Shit, man, Wepe was laughin' his ass off when he told me this! Then he cut off the guy's hand with the gold watch on it and carried it back into the village, yelling ‘I killed the demon! I killed the demon!’ He paraded that hand all around and around the village, then threw it in the river, fat gold watch and all! It sank like a stone! And that was the end of missionaries around there. Crazy shit.” Dave pauses. “Wepe said to me one time, ‘Truth is the tip of my spear.’”

As the phrase sinks in, I'm already transforming it. “Truth is the tip of my tongue,” I quip. “The tongue is mightier than the spear.”

“Except when it's not,” Dave reminds me.

“Truth is on the tip of my tongue,” I continue. “I wish I could tell it! I can taste it. It's bittersweet.”

“To tell the bittersweet truth,” Dave concludes, “I gotta take a crap.”

Carefully, he stands up and climbs down off the floor. Humming and singing, staggering

exaggeratedly, flashlight beam pointed ahead of him, he zigzags across the lawn. I wonder, “Why is he pretending not to be able to walk straight?” I’m very calm, myself. I pray for Aguilar, who’s asleep in the other cabin. I try telepathically to suck some of the power of the venom out of his arm. It works: I feel it in my stomach, a black image, a sensation. At some point I’ll need to vomit. With the ache of poison in my belly, I listen to the insect night bird orchestra. Swirling, the still birds echo, calling the water. Everything’s consciousness, very pure.

And Joaquín’s the Buddha—the local incarnation of that energy.

There’s a quiet rustling of leaves, a bright spot of moving light. I hear Dave’s footsteps in the grass, his voice humming, murmuring. He zigzags back to the hut like the red lightning designs on his arms. I sing a wordless song to welcome him. He sits with his back against a pillar, wearing his dark green tunic with a pink long-sleeved cotton shirt underneath it and, on his head, a half-finished yagé drinker’s crown—a hoop of wood with a woven brim—that Joaquín fashioned for him in Lagarto Cocha. Dave flashes a grin, twinkles his eyes, and croons:

*Every rainbow has a skull for a head.
That’s what I saw when I woke up dead.
That’s where my conclusions inescapably led:
Every rainbow has a skull for a head.*

*And every skull has a rainbow for a tail.
That’s what I saw when I walked up the trail.
Try and disprove it, you’ll inevitably fail,
’Cause every skull has a rainbow for a tail.*

As Dave sings, I see skull-headed rainbows gliding serpentine around the trunk and limbs of an enormous tree whose roots vanish into darkness. One root represents the past in which humans emerged from a cave in Peru. Another root represents the past in which we evolved in Africa. A third represents the past with the Garden of Eden, the snake, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The roots join at the trunk, where we are now. The song and the vision end. I say, “Dude, maybe time’s shaped like a tree, and each of its roots is a different origin myth, and they’re all correct! All kinds of evolution and creation are true, and none of them is the whole story.”

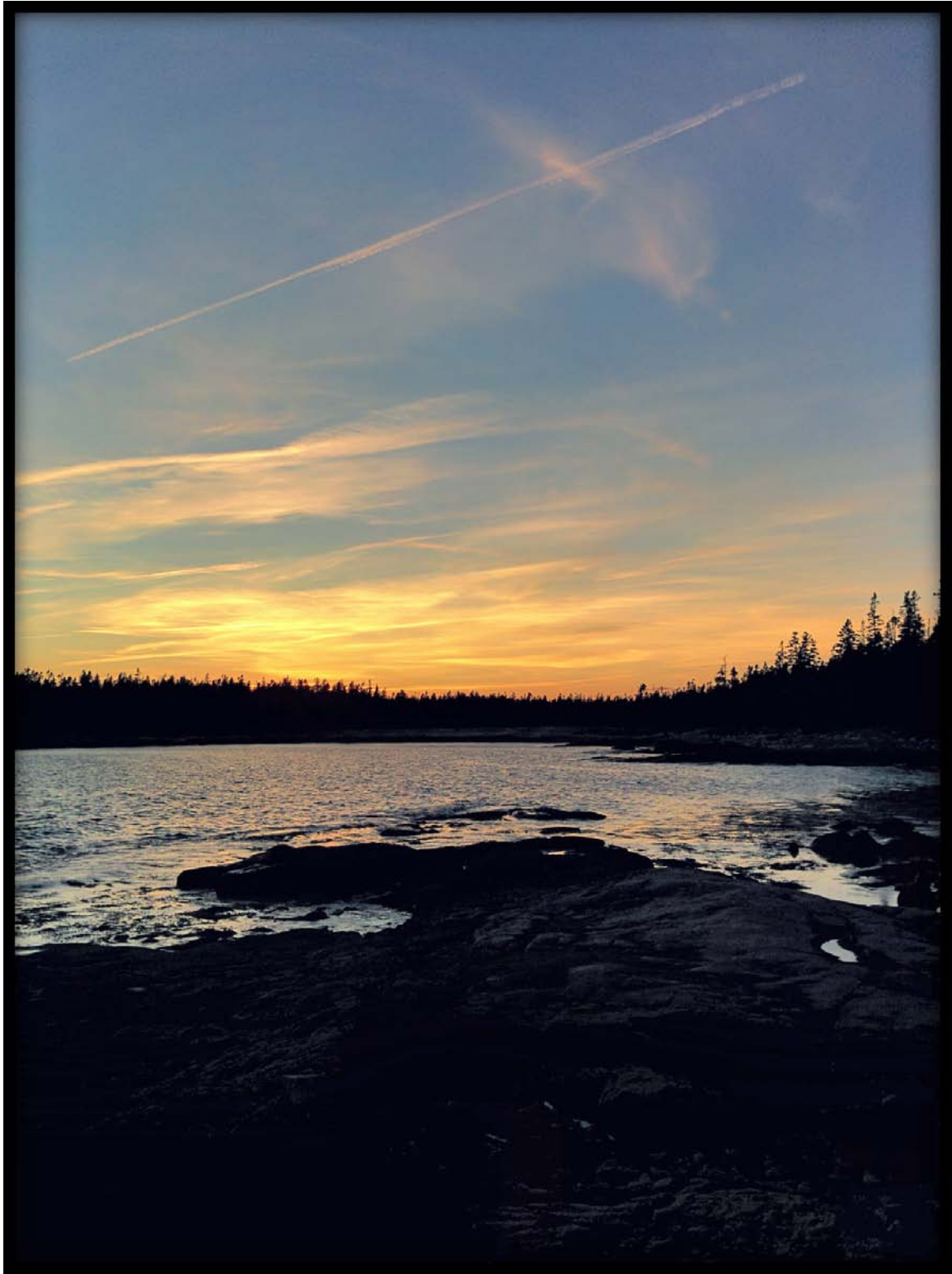
“Right on,” says Dave. “You got it! And here’s a song to go with it.”

*Maybe time is shaped like a tree.
That’s what I saw when you said it to me.
If it’s true or not doesn’t matter to me!
But maybe time is shaped like a tree.*

I crack up. By the light of the kerosene lamp, I notice that two eyes have sprouted on the band of Dave’s crown. I tell him. He laughs. The crown eyes vanish. More eyes appear on his face, on the level with his own eyes, forming a band of linked eyes across the front of his head. An angel-man, he squints at me out of six bright eyes, he grins and laughs.

It’s a bit much. I feel as if I’ve been out in the sun too long. Meanwhile, dark things are transpiring in my guts. Nausea churns. “I’ve gotta go fight some demons,” I mutter.

I get up out of my hammock and get down off the floor onto the ground. The night is vast and dark, the grass soft and damp. I mobilize. War breaks out between me and my demons—half-sensed presences, tactile metaphors, dream predators, parasites who lap the blood of my soul. My strength surges against theirs. I raise my hands in the air and do an ancient war dance. I’m acting—but also incarnating the spirit of an ancestor. He and I grunt, guttural, *Huh huh huh huh hu hu hu hu hu hu*. A



Paleolithic tribal code surges through us: first we show the strangers our peace, then our strength, and if they attack anyway, we devastate them. I'm from half a million years ago, a warrior, a man of God. As David, son of Jesse, said about the Philistines, *Do they have any idea who they're fucking with?*

Nausea hits me again, a solid punch to the stomach. I bellow with pain. Losing the war against myself, I stride to a fallen tree, prop a foot up on its trunk, and vomit with a roar on the other side. Now that I've lost, the victory's mine, complete and resounding. I've driven out the invaders, as all invaders must be driven out, and I bellow toward the river and any demons who can hear, *WE PROTECT OUR OWN!!!!*

The struggle's transpersonal, all of us in this community of neighbors on this river defending ourselves against attackers. The battleground isn't me anymore, but Aguilar. A puma spirit from the highlands enters my body. We stalk, silent, sniffing, peering into the darkness, learning the place. The puma walks out of me and a condor flies in. We extend my arms / his wings, glide above the land. A jaguar's next. Then a wolf. He lopes away, gray form melting into shadow. I turn back toward the cabin. A cluster of stars near the middle of the sky sends a river of multicolored energy swarming into my chest. An unbelievably powerful ecstasy surges through me and I dance and sing:

One love is high! One love is high! One love is high!

Stepping barefoot up the wooden stairs of the hut, I observe drily that strong religious feeling has two related forms. In the first, we feel that everything is beauty, truth, goodness. God is love and the universe breathes in concert. Predator and prey evolve together; dreadful enmities mask joyful conspiracies of compassion. In the second form of strong religious feeling, we identify with this great harmony, and if someone else acts against us, they're acting against *it*, and we're capable of responding with extreme fury.

Back in my hammock, I mutter to Dave, "That wasn't me dancing, it was the universe dancing through me. I remember a Sanskrit word, *lila*, divine playfulness. The cosmos is a carnival and a game of matter-and-energy tag. We're all enjoying ourselves amazingly! Within *lila* is lawfulness: we strive toward good, away from evil; our souls yearn for good like green plants yearn for the sun."

Dave says, "When you were roaring out there, you reminded me of this wicked stone carving I saw in the Museum of Natural History in New York. It's called 'Krishna killing the horse demon,' and it's got Krishna just *whaling* on this evil monster, kicking it in the belly whilst jamming his elbow in its mouth."

"I'd like to see that. We're all Krishna, right?"

"Yeah. Speaking of evil monsters, check *this* out. This happened a few months ago. Five Argentine businessmen bought this friggin' oil company called Maxus that's taking over and polluting Waorani lands. The businessmen were flying to Ecuador to take control of the company when their light plane mysteriously fell out of the sky and they all died!"

"Wow, crazy."

At that moment, we hear movement from the direction of the family hut. A patch of light glides, bouncing, across the ground. Joaquín climbs the steps, greets us, sits in a hammock, clicks off his flashlight. He jokes with us, prays over a cup of yagé, drinks it, wraps himself in a blanket and goes to sleep.

Dave and I each have another cup too and explore the esoteric dimensions of the Maxus executives' crash. We suspect that somewhere a Waorani shaman might be laughing up his nonexistent sleeve. Or maybe it was just a mechanical failure. As humans, we're not smart enough to figure it out, so we sing. Dave picks up the musical bow he made the day before. He puts one end up against the corner of his open mouth, a resonating chamber, and he twangs the string. Then he shows me how to do it. Changing the volume of space inside the mouth changes the overtones.

*What are you going to know?
When are you going to know it?
We sing and play the bow,
ho, ho, ho, ho.*

Dave says, “Joaquín said something really intense when we were in Lagarto Cocha. He said last time he was there, he drank yagé by himself, and *the ghost of his grandfather came to him* and said he should go and live there, where he can lead a proper, traditional life, hunting and fishing, without any interference from the outside world. So he wants to move to Lagarto Cocha, and maybe found a village!

“He was talking about it, and Carlitos was like, ‘What’ll you do if the Peruvians invade?’ And Joaquín was like, ‘I’ll go up a stream and brew yagé and summon demons, and the demons’ll finish off the Peruvians. No problem!’”

“I hope his plan to move there works out. It’d be great to drink deeper in the forest. The deeper the better, you know?”

“For real. And, bro, I’m so sorry you didn’t get to come along to Lagarto Cocha. So check this out. A few years ago I took a journey with some Quichua friends deep into their territory to a tiny settlement of six huts high up off the ground on stilts. It was twilight when we got there, and the guys there were just about to drink yagé! They invited us to join the ceremony. We said, ‘Sure!’ We hadn’t eaten that day anyway.

“A couple hours into the ceremony, I was doing great, but one of my Quichua friends, this guy I’ve known since we were both eleven, started to go *crazy* with pain, *insisting* that the shaman had driven an *iron spike* into the top of his head! He was *yelling* at the shaman to pull the spike out. The shaman totally ignored him and went on singing! The guy climbed down off the hut, and these other Quichuas tried to calm him down, but he kept on sobbing and falling down and screaming. He climbed back up on the hut and *pleaded* with the shaman to pull out the spike. The shaman was like, ‘Be quiet, you’re just making it worse,’ and went on singing. He never admitted or even denied spiking my friend’s head. People suffer *hard* sometimes when they drink yagé!”

Crickets and cicadas wrap us in their intricate music. A bird flutes, a frog peeps. I flash back to my ceremony with Joaquín and Lázaro, and the pain that brought me so close to death. I flash forward to my upcoming trip back to the States. I imagine telling someone there the story of the shaman who may or may not have spiked a guy’s head. I think about this journey of mine, my latest adventure in the southern lands, and about my goal of becoming a shaman and writing about it. I can put all this in my book. Every story’s made up of other stories, each full of idiosyncratic details, exquisitely complex. Stories within stories within stories and songs.

I sing,

*What are you trying to do?
Where have you been?
Who did you meet while you were there?
What did they talk about?
Hey, hey, hey.*

Dave says, “Hey, hey, hey, what do you say we pray for Aguilar?”

“Sure, let’s do it.”

Singing hard, shaking our leaf fans like trees in a storm, we raise a healing prayer for Aguilar. I ask Jesus to help. Waves of force flow to the patient, supporting him in fighting the poison.

Later we fall silent.

A stick cracks.

Another. “¡Vaca!” hisses Dave. Rufino’s three cows are back. Evil or good, they’re hell on Joaquín

and Maribel's crops. Silently, we spring to our feet, cross the floor, ease ourselves to the ground. We whisper to the two dogs, black Cuauquillo and his pale, skinny brother Potente, to come with us. We arm ourselves with heavy sticks and creep toward the invaders. When we get close, they see us and we shout "*¡Vaca!*" and throw the sticks at them. The bovids turn around with a thumping of hooves and begin to exit the scene. The dogs zoom in, barking and snapping, driving them back along the trail they came on.

We primates lope back to the hut with our upright stances, our opposable thumbs, our big brains lit up by yagé.

Dave says, "I'm gonna write an article on how cows are destroying Amazonian shamanism." He sings in Spanish, "I'm going back to the Waoranis ... Waoranis don't have cows."

"Do Waoranis drink yagé?"

"Not usually. Nenke just gets possessed by the jaguar spirit. When I was recording their songs, I recorded some of his trances. When Nenke wants to know something that's happening far away, or is gonna happen in the future, he goes into a trance. First thing is, he gets cranky in the morning. He doesn't eat all day. In the nighttime he lies down and starts friggin' singing and roaring! He's got a special connection with the jaguar, 'cause when he was ten or eleven, he got separated from his family and lived with jaguars for a year and a half. They accepted him 'cause he could already hunt and everything."

I remember what Rufino told me about the jaguars roaring at me from across the river, saying they wanted to be with me. I wonder again if I can join them someday. I consider telling the story, but I don't want to one-up Dave. Anyway, I like his Waorani talk.

"One time when I was there," Dave goes on, "Nenke channeled a song the wild Waoranis have. There are one or two groups of wild Waoranis that have no contact with anyone else. Through the jaguar spirit, Nenke picked up on one of their songs. The words go like this:

*When we are happy, we sing like birds.
When we are angry, we kill like jaguars.
Whoever thinks about coming to look for us feels weak and sad,
because he knows if he meets us,
he'll never see his family again.
Tiririririririri, tererererererererererere.*

"Whoa."

"Check this out. Two years ago some guy hired by the oil company killed a young Waorani who was organizing resistance to oil exploitation. The Waorani was riding on top of a ranchera bus and the thug went up there and shot him. The police said he'd fallen off and hit his head when the ranchera hit a hole in the road, but they wouldn't let anybody do an autopsy.

"A while after that, I was working with another Waorani to translate a tape of one of Nenke's jaguar trances. It was from six months before the killing. As this guy was helping me translate it, he suddenly bursts out crying, *super* hard. I'm like, 'What's wrong?' He goes, 'It's what Nenke says on the tape! Nenke says, 'Young Waoranis shouldn't travel alone. I see a white man on top of a ranchera. He's got a gun. It's not a long gun, it's a short gun. Watch out!'"

"That's fuckin' intense."

"It is, right?" Dave rolls an American Spirit cigar for himself in a half-dry banana leaf and lights it. "Nenke. He told me once, if I ever have trouble with the Devil, I should think of him, and he'll be there. A while after that, I had this dream I was in a house with some kids, and they were showing me some technology they had. Then we found out the Devil was coming. I went out to face him, but as soon as I walked out the door, I realized he was already in the house behind me! I turned around and saw the Devil! And I was like, 'Nenke!!!' And Nenke appeared! And the Devil *blew apart* into all these fragments!"

“Cool!”

“One time I was hanging out in Nenke’s hut. He wasn’t around. Some Waorani guys wanted to dress me as a traditional Waorani, naked with a chambira string tying up my foreskin. But I don’t have a foreskin, ‘cause I’m circumcised. So I was just lying there naked, being real cool, hanging out with these guys in a hammock, when this *sizzling hot* Waorani girl walks in and looks at me, and I got a hard-on! These guys cracked up so bad, one of ‘em fell out of the hammock!” Dave rocks with laughter, then goes on. “Waorani guys have this crazy game they play before they go to sleep at night. They all try to grab each other’s dicks. They’re not gay or anything. It’s just the funniest thing to them.”

“I noticed that. I had my dick grabbed twice. Freaked me out.”

“That game makes them practice dodging—and that’s a skill that can save their lives! Think about it. If you can’t dodge some guy trying to grab your dick, what’ll happen when somebody throws a spear at you?”

“Far out.” I nod. The dick-grabbing makes more sense now. I wonder how long I’d last in a spear fight. Probably a second and a half. Unless I was possessed by the jaguar spirit.

“Waoranis are totally self-reliant,” Dave goes on. “One time we were walking through the forest, and this one Waorani guy started *screaming* and *rolling on the ground*. The other guys laughed at him like crazy and kept on walking. I said, ‘What happened to that dude? Aren’t you going to stop and help him?’ And they said, ‘Naw, he just got bit by a snake.’ I saw the guy a couple days later in the village. He looked all right. Frickin’ Waoranis will basically take your idea of what you think people are capable of, and *completely fuck with it*, with good reason.”

“I can see that. It’s like I was thinking—humans can have any kind of customs. Just like, we can believe anything at all. And everyone’s belief system is equally accurate for the particular world they live in, right? And there are infinitely many types of human society possible. We haven’t seen even a fraction of them yet!”

“And everything we do and say now, Nate, is going to subtly influence everything that comes later—the entire future of the human race, the world, the universe!”

“So we’d better do it well, right?”

“We’d better do it impeccably!” Dave proclaims. “Like our sublime ancestors did! Their thoughts are still with us, their voices, and their auspicious, brave deeds.” He breaks into wordless song, rich and ancient. I close my eyes and I’m sprinting through a vast, semitransparent labyrinth in the form of a maple tree, smashing through its walls.

More stories and more songs. In what McKenna calls “the cool night of the mind,” the world tells itself to itself through us. I quote my phrases from last year: *There’s only one story. How well do you know the story?* We weave wavy webs of weird words and whirled worlds; drunk on dreams, we warp and woof the interminable story. And the dawn breaks.

In the middle of one of Dave’s Waorani tales, I recall someone’s affliction with nightmarish images of sex and violence. Too high to fully identify with that person, I feel compassion for him. I’m a little concerned I might become him again, but either way, I’m not too worried. Right now, I just want to dance. So when Dave finishes the story, I go out and whirl like a dervish.

Above me, bats are breakfasting on crunchy bugs. I look up at them. One zooms close to me. I take it as a sign and stare straight up in the middle of the sky. Dizziness clobbers me with the dizzy club—it doesn’t hurt, but it scrambles me. I stagger-dance off on an erratic, bat-flight-like course before plowing into the soft ground with my knees and hands. Embarrassed to fall in front of Dave, I jump up and do it all again, but trying not to fall. Same spin, same look at the same sky, maybe same bat, same look straight up, but more careful now; same dizziness—being careful didn’t work—; same vespertilian stagger-dash, same plow into the ground, same embarrassment. I struggle to my feet and mentally flip the script, intending to do the whole thing deliberately this time—spin-sky-bat-stare-dizzy-fall. But accidentally falling on purpose proves impossible, and I jerk to a standstill, knees bent, bare feet far apart in the damp grass, the green in my tunic visible in the dawn light, the world swirling around me

with echoing birdcalls, the hum of insects, the chittering of bats.

I straighten up. Dave remarks, “Bro, it looked like those bats were pulling you down!”

I parse the sentence. I think there’s some disconnect between his thought and mine. “No, they were just up there eating bugs. They were cool.”

“I mean those bats that were flying in front of your face.” Under his black curls, his dark eyes are earnest.

“Flying *in front of my face*?” That doesn’t sound right.

“Yeah. One flew down about a foot in front of your nose each time you fell, and both times it looked like it was pulling you down.”

“I had no idea.”

I frown-smile at the bats that zip through the blue air, knowing they can read my expression, wondering what else they could tell me.

As Dave and I stroll back toward the cabin, I remark, “Speaking of bats, right after I saw that bat spirit vision I told you about, I saw the sky outside all filled with shiny black eyes like bat eyes.”

“Yeah?” Dave says. “Man, I saw those eyes too. It looked like they were checkin’ us out.”

We pile into our hammocks to rest. We sway back and forth, drifting, listening, watching the layered palm-frond ceiling swing back and forth. People in the other hut are stirring.

Toucans yelp in the forest. A male oropendola down by the river squawk-chimes like weeping liquid bells. Every time you turn your ears to listen, there’s a new set of sounds. The nighttime frogs have fallen silent, it being dawn.

* * * * *





Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."*

—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

ix. Loneliness

It was not the cold that nearly undid
me those many years, for I'd learned
The Path of General Warmth. Nor hunger
yet, for my jaw's merry companion
schooled me to sustenance with her
knowing cackles. So many nights I slept
beneath pulsing stars, like as a boy,
& felt the *hmming* throughout the
White Woods that *included me* as it
did few men. Men I would meet one day.

It was the dripping, clawing, so close
loneliness, what I could not figure
to undo. What packed with me each
morning; traveled like a wounding ache
my days, my heart; tired me sooner than
my young legs ought have; slept astride
me every night. A wordless, choking
fiber in my beats & breath, slowing me
a little more each day. Wrinkling my faith,
pocking the air as I hiked along. My doubts
formed a hard, cold skin around me.

Yet I walked on. Something still flowed
freely in me, my senses still wrangled
with what they felt, still pushed me
to find food, water. But more. Still harked
me to the elliptical, luring sounds of music
in these Woods. The many kinds of trees
& bushes playing lovely through the wind.
The way light rains & heavy would varied
strum & stroke the grass, bare earth,
fallen limbs. The heavier darkness of
winter, its graceful recession in spring.

I avoided the places where men settled,
 or massed. At first I was scared, like someone
 would fetch me back where I came from.
 But miles & years passed. I realized
 I wasn't *that* important to those back
 there. A memory, a smile, a nod, move on.

It was *my heart* that yearned back,
 that slowed my countless steps away,
 that never accepted that I wouldn't return
 one far day, *matter* one far day. Undo
 those cruel, satisfied men their wrongful rule.
 Save the world. *Save my home.*

I wouldn't stay anywhere long. Nowhere
 but a mythical Island lured me to pause,
 seemed important enough to *matter*. Wherever
 I was seemed *along*, seemed *not there yet*.
 But how do you find a memory's vision?
 And why didn't this vision fade as the miles
 & the many years passed?

Maybe it was the passenger in my
 hollow tooth. She was often quiet,
 sometimes for days. I made myself be patient.
Not fear for her safety, *not* fear I'd lose
 her one night. I trusted her. *We mattered*
to each other. We had traveled together
 so long, & I believed would arrive together
 as well. Maybe then I would feel her
 climb from my tooth, behold her small glory.

When did the long path turn? It's like
 I didn't know at first. Did the air riffle
 differently, did I feel less lonely?
 Did the Island seem nearer than
 it had since that distant night with
 the old women?

Yes. But was it was really *her*. I woke one morning from a heavier sleep than in a long time. Woke to cackling & gnattering in my mouth like long unheard & felt. I gathered my few possessions together. Clothes thefted from washing lines long ago, soft & worn but still strong. I'd learned over the years: *thieve from the rich*. Knapsack I'd found next to an old old man who'd fallen on his last walk, his leg still bent wrong, yet a peaceful look in his light blue eyes.

Hurried, feeling her directing me like old with her strange noises, like again I was the delightful game she laughed to play. There *was* something bright & new in the air. The pathless trees welcomed my passage. I tried, as long had not, to *hmmm*, to sing my excitement.

I came upon . . . a girl. Young, dark-haired, pretty. Someone's prey, or property, she flinched from me, till I smiled, raised open hands, kneeled to a crouch before her, less able to chase if she chose to run.

She chose instead to let me protect her passage awhile. We had no common tongue between us, or she simply chose not to answer me. Our arrangement became: I walked, she followed. If noises loud or small occurred, she would flee up to me, near enough for me to defend. Then trail off, as the quiet of these White Woods resumed.

She was tireless, & would only stop for my aching legs, let me feed her of what I had, if my face grew cross. Slept close enough to shelter behind me, like a big rock. Rarely met my eyes. Never did I expect her to remain by morning, staring at me through the back of her skull like sleep only let someone *closer*.

The last day we moved at our usual quick pace, but she seemed nearer to me than usual. Spooked like Creatures get, feeling things deep & close that I could not know. She let me feed her, agreeably. Smiled me? Frowned? I knew not girls of any kind, much less the silent, fleeing, feral kind.

The moon above full, a rouse to these White Woods, a song compelling to sing, to travel along this night sky, a-sniff for some new knowing, & yet I slept, early, hard, like this girl's fear a fever I longed to break. Give her words to tell her what & why, give her strength to ask what the world might offer.

My dreams filled, slowly at first, then fuller & fuller, with the *Hmmmmmm* all through the White Woods, with power that seemed ancient, long beyond men's simple trick of good & evil. I felt the *Hmmm* flow over me like a stream of warm light, & then sink in me, my soul's every open, thirsty pore.

Did I wake? Did I wake? We were in a clearing now, aswim in a sea of full moonlight. I tried to stand, & couldn't, so crouched as I had when we met. She was standing, though, naked, long wrapped hair now down, arms stretched to the moon, the Woods, the wide, wide world.

Her body young but womanly full, & I realized she was *hmmming* in almost a not human way. She sang with her torso, her breasts, her hips, her long legs. The braided *hmmm* around us *braided around her*.

I felt she could tell me if I asked, if she chose to speak. *Where is the Island? Where is the Tangled Gate? How do I save the world?*

I am so alone.

She turned & looked toward me, never
 ceasing her singing, & yet answering
 me. I fell back, helpless, *let myself*
do so. Trusted her as I lay on my back
 in the full moonlight, & she sang &
 sang me deeper into something, *into*
something, into feeling what undergird
 the world, not a rock or a hand
 to cling to, but a *song*, a simple
 shared song. First & last & always.
There was no less. There was no more.

Learn to sing. Learn to sing together.

I woke by dawn, along a road, something
 I'd not seen in a long while. She was gone,
 like she'd never been. Except she had.
 She'd opened herself up to me too,
 that long night, saw what I yearned,
 & left me just a running distance from
 its tents, & flags, & carnival wonders.

x. Creature Carnival, Part 1

Some nights I would wonder my
 half-dreaming way deep into the stars
 so high above my small, prone form,
 & I would think: do they too expect
 suffering more, & marvels less, as they
 mature to whatever they best become?

I traveled these weird, wonderful
 White Woods for years. Sent as a
 bony, crooked youth into a world
 I didn't know how strange twas, to *save*
 it from I knew not what, nor little how.
 Carried in my very jaw the world's
 token & reminder how it is a laughing game
 with rules no man contrived, or controls.

Yet I would wonder into those million
 speckled lights if they had been revealed
 an easier path for love to be shared,
 & received. What potion, from which
 alien leaves & berries; what soft, strong
 god suckling; what fine dreams did
 fill them, wake with them, flow
 among them, build better their worlds?

My time among the Creatures had
 hinted something to me, caused me
 to feel beyond my own eyes & bones,
 compelled me to grasp of new marvels
 in this world, & their fragility, & what
 half-known powers in me could do
 to protect, to teach, to perpetuate.

The strange dark-haired girl had let me
 find strength to protect one closer
 to myself, even if not that close,
 even if my protecting may have been
 more an obscure lesson than reality.

But I still wasn't sure, still didn't know,
 still looked to those colorful tents
 in the distance that cool morning &
 did not imagine marvels waiting there.
 Only men to be avoided as ever.

Until I saw someone approaching me
 from there, coming down the road
hmmming what my ears had slowed,
 as always, to detect in the air,
 all around me. But then there it
 was, this ancient wordless song,
 like an open hand if I could grasp it,
 if I could keep mine own in it.

A bear walking upright, no higher
 than partway to my knee, *hmmming* &
 smiling right to me. Wearing a vague
 sort of warm black hat, & a neat
 little black bowtie. Black eyes but
 otherwise snow's first white.

I did not stand, as I had learned
 I was too tall for Creatures to behold
 calmly. But I pulled up into a crouch, &
 opened my hands as gesture he
 would understand. Yet he came right
 up to me, & I heard a pleased titter
 in my jaw. He offered me a handbill,
 & then a wave of his paw, & then was
 returning whence he came.

A sheet of thick, rough paper, &
 figures upon it made by a coal or
 charred stick. Yet the image of
 those tents, clear upon it, &
 the words "X's Carnival of
 Mysteries & Wonders" in legible,
 simple form. Much smaller below,
 these were the words writ:
"For those lost."

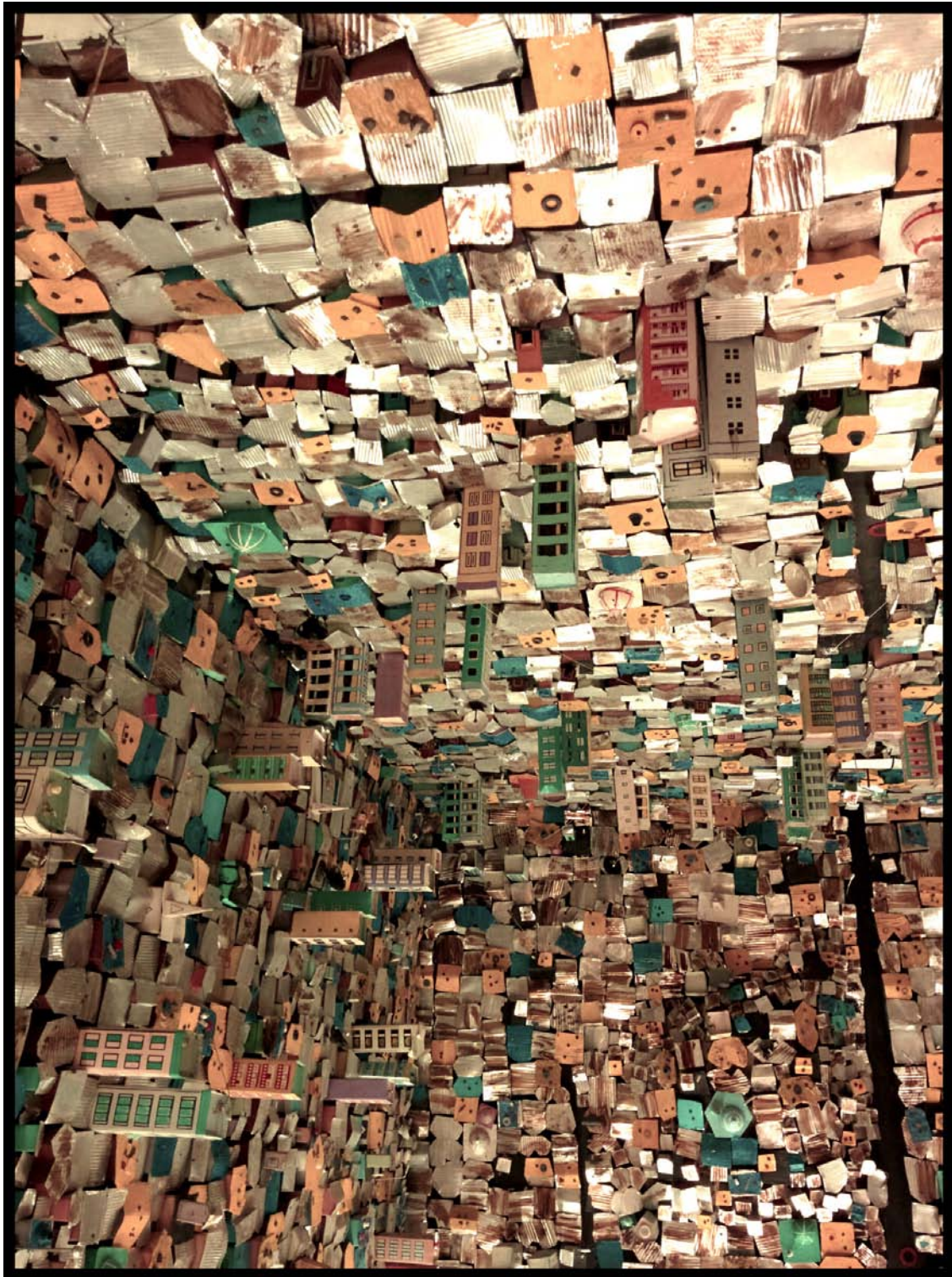
I stood. I stretched. I drank
 plentifully from my water sack, as
 though my usual rationing was for a time
 now past. Dusted myself off,
 swung my knapsack on my shoulder,
 & set off at a good walk to those
 tents. Unhesitant, unslowed. Unsure
 why yet unsure this uncertainty.

There was a wide entrance to this
 Carnival, as though all welcomed, rich
 or poor. The sign that greeted me,
 that I passed under, said the same
 as my handbill. I slowed to a walk,
 since I did not know if men trucked
 here among these wonderful Creatures.

Yet no man met me, or was nearby to
 be seen. Instead, twas a curly furred
 pink pup & her lovely white pony
 companion—each spangled quietly
 in shiny baubles, each no taller than
 that bear had been—that met
 me next. No words but what smiles
 do in their stead. A wish to welcome,
 to lead me further in.

I hesitated. Too tall. Too much a man
 in this small magick. *Too much of me.*

They stopped, gazed me kindly,
 remembered in my mind how I had
 held & comforted so many of them
 in the cold, how I had found
 them the Path of General Warmth.
 How the tiny one in my jaw had
 been taken bravely by me away
 from cruel captors. *This all mattered.*



I relaxed, a little, standing there, closed
 my eyes, tried to be something good,
 generous, something a part of me was,
 & the rest looming large over it. A cackle
 sounded deep in my mind, far deeper
 than my jaw, there was a nudge,
 & I opened my eyes, wide, wider.

The white pony & pink poodle were
 looking at me face to face. Willing me
 climb on the pony, & *come along*.

I climbed on. Now them six feet
 high, or me barely twelve inches,
 I climbed on & rode along.

There were many tents & booths
 along the way, mysteries & wonders
 I was not bound for then. They
 were eager to bring me to past where
 a blue & pink piglet was making
 strange tricks with a pack of cards,
 catching my eye. Nodding me touch
 my head, where I discovered a tall
 hat of her strange cards, arrived & formed.

Past a pink & white elephant tending
 a forest of beautiful pine cones &
 lovely blooming plants. Past a
 candle of every color, taller than I
 was now, flame swirling around me
 in sweet, sharp, soft scents.

Past a black striped White Tiger
 with blue eyes like the furthest
 unvisited seas. And so many others.
Hmmming me along, welcoming me,
hurry, go & see!

A tent taller than the rest, much taller,
 a beautiful white like the bow-tied bear,
 its entrance strangely shaped, almost like
 the ancient Gate I sought on the
 timeless Island. And yet we passed
 freely through & I was arrived where
 they all wished me, a glare & a darkness
 confusing my eyes a long moment. Yet
 no longer afraid. I touched my tall playing
 card hat, still atop my head, smiled, &
 trusted whatever good was to come.

x. Creature Carnival, Part 2

There is scent before I open my eyes.
 Many things in it. Feces, sex play,
 things moldering. These Woods consume
 to create. The blood society of living,
 mortal things, perishing soon or sooner
 by claw & tooth. But no men. Not yet.
 Not here the Beast that out-thinks
 his prey, & smiling to it. Kills for practice.
 Kills for trophy. Men will come & awake
 something in these Woods. The fear
 of *casual possession*.

Open my eyes. I'm on the ground. There
 is no great tent before or around me.
 Tis a great clearing, tallest Woods on
 all sides. But. There is, at the far
 edge, a . . . platform? On it, a stage?
 I stand, gingerly, remembering I am
 likely inches tall. Walk toward it.
 Looks anciently wooden. The stage
 is at my eyes' height. I stroke its
 edge, warm, *hmmming*. This is
 living wood still, when at rest.

The clearing is empty, even of my
 former companions. Something here
 they wish to show me. No men
 here but me. Yet they are compelled.
 The Creatures? The Woods themselves?
 I try to *feel* something deeper here.
 Listen for the cackle in my jaw.
 She is quiet but, I feel, not absent.
 Cares me as friend. Would have me
 uncertain, alert for the telling of it all.

I veer toward the center of the clearing,
 walk its grassy way. Test each step,
 then less so. How does a man teach
 himself to learn from his blood & bones?

It begins thus: *I am a man*. I come
 here as no other. I am welcomed.
 I am . . . needed? I look all around
 this clearing, breathe slower, a beat,
 & speak.

“Show me. Let me see why I am brought
here to your special place.”

A pause. It lingers. I wait. Slow
my impatient breath & wait.

I'm not sure how the clearing fills
so full, or so sudden, nor quite
what kind of furry little beings
it fills with. Long antennae & tails.
Oversized beautiful eyes. Wearing
patched together clothes like they
are not sure for why.

I am tall among them but not
overly so. They don't fear me.
They don't know fear. Just the novel
look of my bare face & longer torso.
Close to me all around & wanting
me to see what's come.

I look toward the stage platform,
but now tis a cluster of Islands.
I count. Six of them, close, dreaming?
These lands are living, like Creatures,
how wondrously so? Dreaming close
in a wide, wide sea. At peace.

What falls from the sky strikes
the shallows of one of them. A sound,
a splash. They wake, these Creature Islands,
they wake to it & are terrified.
They terror & fly from each other.

I watch all but one flee far,
& this one seems to grasp me,
& my strange fellows, *to come along,*
come in, come with me, something's
begun.

We are pulled, lifted, & carried,
through ancient Woods just like these,
deeper & deeper on this Island,
until we come to something, a structure
so massive it fills the skies above
entirely. A Gate. *The Tangled Gate.*

Now lifted through & swept within like
 this ever our dance, past a
 fountain ancient, yet clear water,
 down paths whose walls rise high
 above us, made of vines & stones.

Come, & less so all of these
 furry smiling strangers & me, &
 more so my partner the Island
 is compelling just *my* torso,
 holding just *my hands*.

Come of a sudden to a cave &
 into its blackness, & for a moment
 I see & feel the violent bloodbath
 for gods, cunts, & lands that is
 ever & all of human history, & I
 am now screaming & cursing,
 pushed through & past it, & come
 of a sudden to a very quiet place.

Stop. I look around. Tis a Great Cavern.
 A tree its center blindingly tall.
 And everywhere, *everywhere*, all the
 Creatures I have known. Awake.
 Aware. Waiting. That splash in the
 waters above had done this.
 They wait for . . .

Me? No. *Her*. A girl's face, pretty,
 kind, sad. I watch this face mature
 from round & pudgy to slenderer,
 her body matures around her,
 the Creatures have awaited her
 take her place among them, at
 their head, & they flow in & around
 her like sea foam, like happy melody.

She lives in this cavern with them,
 though somewhere else too. She visits
 & they receive her happy, unsure why
 she departs. How this is her dreaming,
 from a remote place, staying as she can.

She *hmmms* with all of them, keening
 for hours, days at a time, & slowly
 they know whence she comes.
 Where men struggle, explain cruelty
 when they cannot sing together.

It darkens her, that world, saddens
her, & they wish to help. Help this
loved friend amongst them.

They learn she likes when they dance,
when they tumble. She likes their
casual acrobatics. Uncertain what
any of it means, they try out
tricks & stunts to delight her.

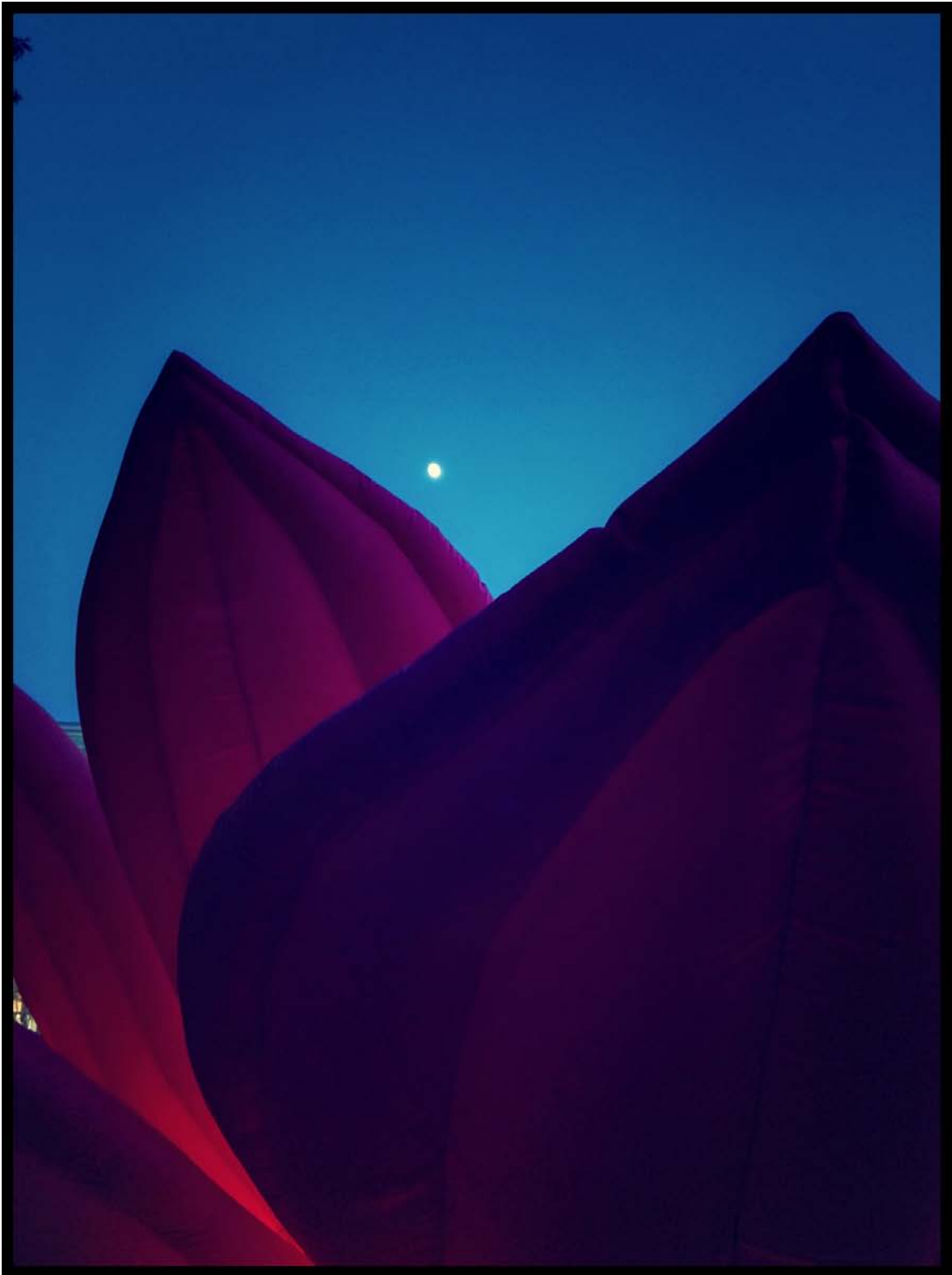
It becomes something, in men's tongue
she calls it *Carnival*. They sort
through themselves for the highest
jumpers, nimblest dancers, touches
of something new & novel, not in form,
but *intent*.

Throughout this place, a happiness
builds up, spangles out. This becomes
something they do together, to please
her. Then to please each other.
Orchestrate how they entertain her,
how one marvel reveals the next.

A night the moon so full above,
the Great Cavern lit every speck.
Creatures dancing, tumbling, riding
one another for novel sport, singing
songs in her tongue, whatever they mean.
She laughs. She loves them.
She must share this.

Over the course of many, many
dreams, many frolicks & songs,
many slow teachings, she gives them
to learn her tongue, many full &
dark moon nights.

She will let them go. She will keep them.
She will send them into the cruel
bloodsport world of men, its lonely
villainy, iterate them into this world
to sing & dance & entertain.
Find who will heed. Find who will learn.



I feel now lifted & carried through
 miles & years, like a speck, like a
 precious speck, to arrive back
 here, in this clearing, & reckon
 that all I had just seen & been
 has not yet happened. The Islands
 have not yet spooked & fled.

I sit, hard, on the grassy ground,
 & wonder what am I to do,
 with all this. How to make it come
 to pass. *How to make this world.*

Close my eyes. Hold myself in a
 crouch in this wonderful place.
Please. Tell me. Please.

Open my eyes. Pink poodle. White pony.
 Many many Creatures now around
 me. Loving me, that's what. *That's all
 ever what.* I stand up. A little
 taller than them now, but OK still.

Want to say. *So want to say.* What?

I *hmmm*, as so often before.
 I *hmmm*, for all they've shown me.
 I *hmmm*, for what I have to do.
 I *hmmm*, for how much I love them.
 I *hmmm*, for how much I love this world.
 I *hmmm*, *for how I will find a way to save it.*

xii. Oscillating

*"Well I'm here to tell you now,
 each and every mother's son.
 You better learn it fast,
 You better learn it young.
 Someday never comes."*

—Creedence Clearwater Revival, 1972.

She leads me, the dark-haired girl,
 holding my hand tightly, close,
 close, but her protecting me this time,
 & her powerful, & me feeling like
 the boy I was when I fled with
 my friend in my jaw.

Through White Woods, full moon,
 pathless course, mile upon mile,
 our feet hardly tread solid on ground,
 swift, swifter, I wonder if Creatures
 are near, try to *hmmm*, but a
 broken croak comes out.

Does she *hmmm*? Any sound at all?
 Something deeper still than my ears?
 I'm unable to speak, to anything but swift
 along. Then we come sudden to a clearing
 & stop. The full moonlight so bright I can
 hardly tell what this is.

Then I see how the trees bordering this
 clearing, & the branches hanging over it,
 form its light & shadows into a . . . building?
 A building of light. Shaped like a . . . temple?
 As my eyes adjust, the building solidifies
 before me, never fully solid, but yet
 there a door, above a spire. *Real enough*.

She's behind me, waiting. Says nothing,
 as ever, but points to the temple
 door. Isn't holding my hand. Isn't
 coming with me. This seems another
 gift from her, like the Carnival long
 ago, whatever it is they are.

The door is open & I step in. I am both
 in a moony clearing, ground beneath
 my feet, trees about me, & I'm not.
 This temple is very old & very purposeful.
 Tis one room empty but for a small
 purple stool in the corner, waiting.

Upon it a book. Carved from the world's
 first tree. Upon it, my breath quicks
 to see, a dim but glowing image of
 The Tangled Gate, my long long quarry.
 I lift the heavy cover & push it back.
 A single sentence on a white sheet.

"Events as they have, & may yet, occur."

There are images of things I know, or
 feel like I know. The Island, its Gate,
 Creatures in the White Woods. A man
 asleep in a ship's cabin, his hand
 clutching a strange, powerful-looking
 stick. Another kneeling in a narrow shack.

Who are they? Why am I led here?
 I turn more pages. A dark man, artist
 at his easel, his painting of a White Birch,
 like I could step into this page & climb
 its beautiful glowing branches. A woman,
 I think, coupling with a furious-faced man,
 yet her look beatific & solely upon me.

A boy sitting in his tent, curled in the dim
 around a tiny thing twittering in his
 hand. Twittering? Can I actually hear it?
 Another page filled with handwriting &
 yet I can only make out the words
 "*Remember some things*" at its commence.

I turn pages faster & faster, like my time
 here is near gone, like *I must learn*
something important. A great castle,
 on the Island, & a middle-aged
 man, feigning the dignity of high office
 for others, walks restless its lookout to sea.

A young girl approaches him. She radiates power
 yet humbly, by long habit, defers to his
 words, his views. They stand together.
 She is happy in this moment, yet his like
 happiness wisps away, & he returns
 to a dark, secret room, a dark summoning
 his loins pull him to.

The pages become harder to turn, & he
 feels the light passing that allowed
 him his presence here. He crouches
 more frantically over the book, shoving
 at the leaden pages. *Something, give me*
something please.

A bridge. By an overgrown stream.
 The sound of frequent passage as
 he sits beneath the bridge, the water
 fast & clear. The sound of laughing
 voices in the distance. Approaching
 at a run. So excited.

I wake. I'm lying on a thin mattress in
 a small room in some kind of strange
 inn. I've been here for days, or weeks.
 I don't often eat. I have no possessions
 anymore, so it is easy to leave.
 I walk slowly, long unaccustomed
 to the road. To hope.

A bridge in the White Woods. All the
 rest. A dark-haired girl from long ago
 in a dream. A clearing shaped like
 a temple in full moonlight.
 A book of maybes. A dream. A bridge.
I need a stream.

The water is cold, so wonderfully cold.
 The bruises from whores' switches
 ache but toward healing. Nothing
 important's withered off me. My
 head, my hands, my heart, all
 remain. I sing as I scrub my
 large but hungry body. My singing
 becomes *hmmmming* as long it
 hasn't. Louder & louder, with
 laughing in it, like sugar, with tears
 in it, like what must be done, &
 who must be found to help.



* * * * *



A Single Fletching [Fragment]

I hesitate to call myself a worldly man. It's true that I've traveled some little bit, but am certainly no explorer like Schultes or Burton. My work of selling found and forgotten manuscripts has taken me to some very strange places, and I've collected many stories along the way.

There is one story that has always stuck in my head, as a half-remembered dream will do sometimes. It's like when a snatch of beautiful song stays with you, but you can never remember the end of it. Like when you can sing the whole of the song but can't remember the words until they come out of your mouth, almost as if by magick.

When I was in the North of the United States, some three years ago now, I was visiting an old friend who dealt in semi-magical trinkets and fetishes from the extreme north. It was at his shop that I found the book *Tales of Aeries*. An energetic-seeming manual that collected cult myths from Roman worship of Diana. I perused the index and saw it had curious chapters like "Sorrows of the Sea" and "Tales from the Silent Woods." Within the pages, I found the single fletching. A mere feather. It bookmarked a woodcut.

I arrived back to my flat that day, sat down by my window and flipped the pages until I was stopped by the woodcut. It was an unearthly and striking woman. I stared at that picture for some minutes, my fingers tracing the beautiful outline of her face as if to understand her better.

The image was surrounded by thirteen stars, and she stood on a riser of three steps. One hand was held over her heart and the other held a small cup of unknown contents. She was known as "The Transpicious One." The one who could never be again unseen.

I found all that I could about her in the coming months, spending many hours in dark bookshops and consulting stalls where women read cards or told the stories of past lives. There was very little to be found about her. One old woman had said that she was an immortal spirit that appeared to those who had lost heart and the death of soul was near. She was also said to be an advocate of the smallest of lives, and could summon all manner of flying creatures from the insect kingdom.

One old book I found had an illustration of her being carried by a thousand giant dragonflies. The page opposite showed her removing an arrow from a forest beast surrounded by oak trees. She was like nothing else that I had seen or heard of. I had to find out more. Was there any truth to this ephemeral lore?

My mind became obsessed with her! My every waking moment I examined carefully copses and sunlit glades to find any evidence of her having been there. I consulted beehives and lovelinesses of ladybird beetles. I walked the desert places to communicate with chrysalis attached to milkweed that were transitioning their two worlds. I stalked the shorelines to speak with maiden flies. I brought fallen fruit for families of wasp.

I had only once the strongest feeling of just missing her this last spring! While walking in the cool woods of Maine, I found my way into a brilliant opening of sunlight and oak trees. In that faerie ring of light were thousands of Eastern Pine Elfin butterflies. There were so many of the creatures that, as they sat there fanning their wings, I could hear their words even though I was unaided by charms. They whispered, “She comes!” and “She has heard our call!” and “Will she heal our Pine Elfin Queen?”

The Pine Elfin butterflies suddenly synchronized the flutter of their reddish gold wings and I heard the speech of wings softly chant, “We will have faith. We are Servants of Air and we will have faith.”

My head exploded with light and I fell to the ground unconscious. I woke up wet from the grass, early evening. There were footprints in the grass not far from where I had laid prone those hours, and surrounding those prints had risen a faerie ring of *Boletus Edulis*. The King Boletus mushroom.

I repeated the words to myself of what I had heard the Pine Elfin say: “I will have faith. I am Servant of Air, and I will have faith.” I now start and close my every day with these words.

The spring had moved into the night of summer solstice and strawberry moon. I was lying in bed, sleepless, frustrated, and hopeful. It was hot in my flat, and my mind was filled with the image of that first woodcut I had discovered those three long years ago. Sweating rivulets in my poor and worn bed, I flopped fish-like. I was miserable in my loneliness and need for answers. For a Vision of Her.

I had sold almost everything that I had once owned to finance my collection of books and every likeness of her that I could find. My once modest wealth was mostly gone, but my small spells provided for my immediate needs, and I made sums telling fortunes with cards, and reading the shapes of smoke.

As I lied there with the light of the strawberry moon shining through my window, eyes half closed and weeping, I suddenly felt the slightest shimmer of air. *A breath almost!* I felt six tiny feet land on my bare chest. I opened my eyes to see what had just transpired. I was surprised to see a beautiful green Lunar Moth busying itself with tasting the sweat on my chest.

I said the spell of Xenoglossia: “Tu exaudies me!” *Do you hear me!* I had to be careful with my breath, so as not to accidentally dislodge on my Lunar guest. I had become quite proficient in my communications with the insects in the last year, and I thought I had made some progress in my pilgrimage. I had started to listen more clearly to the small lives that surrounded me. I had become a disciple.

* * * * *

Charlie Beyer


The Dead Cat Incident

[Prose]

November 27, 2000
David Van Thorn, Attorney-at-Law
No. 1 Elm Street, Suite 201
Astoria, OR 97103

Dear Mr. Van Thorn,

Thank you for your offer to discuss the “cat incident” with me, Police Report #20001781. I am writing to you instead of visiting, in the expediency of time, and so that you have a record of my statement.

I feel that I have been wrongfully caught up in somebody else’s business, and put under great hardship for an issue in which I was only trying to act as a Good Samaritan. I was unaware of the surrounding situation. I request that you throw this ticket out of the books, and release me from this legal entanglement. At worst, I would ask that the ticket be reduced to a minor misdemeanor, with a small fine in the \$100 range, in contrast to the exorbitant fine of \$3,672, which has been levied.

I apologize for having this issue a reality at all, and for wasting the valuable resources of yourself, and the court system. If you can waive or reduce the violation, I would greatly appreciate it, and request that you do so before Nov. 30, 2000 at 5:30 PM. At that time I will be appearing before the judge and entering a plea of not guilty, as you have previously advised. I will also enter my statement at that time, if allowed.

As I may have told you already, I also work with the government. I am an engineer for the Roads Dept. in Thurston Co., WA., and supervise a crew of inspectors working county-wide. I am familiar with process and violations. We deal with each situation with some measure of individuality, particularly when the issues are minor, and there is no threat to public or private safety, or a threat to property.

In Astoria, Oregon here, I own a house, am putting two teenagers through the high school, my wife is employed with a respected organization, and I run a business manufacturing hovercrafts for government use. I have had this business for about five years here, and spend considerable money in town both for parts and labor, frequently employing two area craftsmen.

As the owner of a small business, I am constantly on the red line—currently forced to move out to a higher rent shop—and, as such, would be completely devastated by the fine as it stands. I would be forced to close up shop, put my tools in storage, and fire two employees. Please prevent this one puny incident from having a deep and lasting effect on myself, and on the community. I am hoping to turn Astoria into a manufacturing, training, and touring center for hovercrafts. I have had considerable difficulty to date, and am unable to handle one more blow.

Thank you for your consideration of the facts in this matter. I can be reached anytime between now and the arraignment date at (360) 555-0100. Please call and let me know what you think can be done, or how I should proceed.

The following is the sequence of events as they took place the morning of Nov.13, 2000:

1. When I pulled into the yard area of the Bumble Bee Shipyard (my shop being in the building over the river), I saw Officer Brian Sloty alongside the entryway, and slowed to 2 MPH, attempting to make eye contact, and see if he wished to discuss anything with me. As I received no acknowledgment, I proceeded.
2. I pulled into the building and observed a dead cat in the entryway.
3. At this point, my employee John Overholuse did not come out of my shop to discuss any issue with me, as he was wearing hearing protection, and was unaware of my return.
4. Then I acted impulsively and moved the dead animal to clean up the public entryway, and hastened back to the needs of the fellow working for me. By “moved,” I mean that the corpse was thrown into the river at the end of the building. I believed that this “trash” would remain in place indefinitely, as is the case with all other trash dropped by other locals about the facility. I frequently have customers coming by who do not need to see a rotting dead cat.
5. After the “incident,” the Officer came down to my shop and inquired as to the whereabouts of the dead animal—for *evidence*, he said. He wanted to know if I’d buried it and where. I had to confess that I had hurled the body into the river and the outgoing tide. I then took about a half hour assisting the Officer in attempting to retrieve the thing, and even offered the use of a rowboat for the retrieval, which was refused. The Officer then asked for my driver’s license, and took additional information. I resumed work.
6. The Officer then returned in approximately another hour, and cited me with the \$3,672 ticket. I was surprised beyond belief.
7. After the Officer left the premises, the dead cat was retrieved by its owner from the end of the building. The animal was taken to the Animal Control department. They would not issue a receipt for the carcass.
8. The Officer was informed by the cat owner that the animal had been dispatched to Animal Control. The Officer would give no written acknowledgment of the animal retrieval, nor would he retract the ticket, even though the little body had been recovered. He was noted to be chuckling and giggling over the fact that I had been issued this ticket. *How professional is that?*
9. Since then, it has been noted that the Officer wrongfully imagines that I had, and have, an “attitude” in spite of my citizen’s efforts to assist the Officer. He expressed this to the building’s owner, Johnny Terribocia. The Officer: *This guy doesn’t like me.* I have never given any indication to that effect, and am confused as to the origin of the comment. I would hope that the Officer’s personal self-image is not an influence in this issue, which is more of a life-or-death issue to me, rather than one for humor.

Thank you for your attention to this situation. Again, I request that this matter be kept out of the court system, and dealt with as a minor misdemeanor at most, or not at all. Please contact me with your conclusions with all haste. Thank you.

Sincerely,

C.B.
Best Coast Hovercraft Inc.
69 Main Street
Astoria, OR 97103
Cell Phone: (360) 555-0100

My pen has been slathering words designed to politely confute the asinine local municipal bureaucrats, in an attempt to save my ass from digging my grave deeper. I have taken up groveling obsequiously for mercy to these pricks. The “cat incident” fell upon me from the cosmos at a time of intense other complications. Life was cruel and dark. To say the following is a bad whine is rather understated. This is a whole rotten vineyard.

I borrowed 12,000 dollars to start a hovercraft charter business, consisting of a 6-passenger hover and my large balls. At the modest speed of 45 MPH, just a half an hour into its maiden voyage, the boat exploded, nearly killing my two passengers.

I was being evicted from my shop so the building could be torn down. This, after spending over a thousand dollars to bring the place into a habitual state. I had a hovercraft hull half-built, and two employees of dubious character.

My seediest employee, a welder, was suddenly extradited to a small county jail in the sagebrush territories of Washington State, after a routine traffic check had found numerous warrants out for his arrest. His parole violations stemmed from a grand larceny charge. I must have missed that on the resume.

My current client proved to be a flaming alcoholic who wanted his boat finished two months early. That means that any profit had to go into additional labor, who would then no doubt work proportionately slower. First though, I had to pay \$500 ransom to the county judge to spring my welder, as “hunt’n season” was on, and His Honor was “look’n forward” to that new gas grill for the “elk camp.”

My other job decided to make me temporary boss of the department. A fellow employee, in an apoplectic fit of seething jealousy over this promotion, took a laundry list of my crimes to the Director, in an attempt to have me fired.

I was called to the carpet to explain complete disorganization of all paperwork and staff (maybe true), using county computer resources to run my own business (only half true), and sodomizing the janitor (no, not true).

When I went downtown, I received multiple \$20 tickets for illegal parking. Every time I moved the car to another illegal spot, I got another ticket. The Meter Maid had a wanted poster of me in her scooter.

At my lovely home, my manic daughter decided to take 19 credits in college. That landed her in the loony bin for the resulting suicidal/depressive stage of her bi-polar syndrome cycle. My son signed up for an Advanced Marijuana Consumption class, hosted by the local gang at the 7-11, and went into a state of mood swings he must have learned from OJ Simpson. My wife of 24 years got two jobs. To celebrate her newfound independence, she piled all my clothes in the front yard and said she’s keeping the dog. *Don’t come back. Don’t call.* This was an unexpected reward for years of artistic encouragement and financial support.

If the sun shown, I was in a shadow. If a bird sung on a branch to passer-bys, it defecated on me as I walked underneath. If I bought a scratch lottery ticket, it said I owed *them* \$2. My skin had broken out in hives that I scratched as vigorously as any fresh mosquito bite. I was chain smoking so hard I could barely breathe, and my teeth were permanently clenched in an 880 PSI bite. I thought I had the later stages of tetanus. The jaw muscles on the side of my face were so tight, they caused me to go deaf in one ear.

So I went to the emergency room. Filled out three hours of paperwork and got a plastic wristband. Ugly people with scabs scented the waiting room with sneezed viral spray. Dressed in a butt-wagging robe and laid on a stretcher, I was wheeled into a blue ceramic room.

Now, Miss Underhill, the scrub surgeon said to me, We’ll finally explore here, and find out if it really is your appendix that’s causing this discomfort that you feel. The scalpel glinted menacing in the light beam. As the gas mask closed on my face, the nurse got suspicious of the beard and checked my wristband. Miss Underhill was clutching her side in the other wing of the hospital, getting checked for

an ear infection.

The tooth pressure of my dead man's grin had shattered a few of the back molars. My tongue thought it was on glass clean-up detail after a WrestleMania tailgate party. Emergency charged me \$400, and told me not to stress so much. Go see a dentist.

I went to the dentist. He was in a flat rush, working four chairs. Finally he pries my jaw open, knee on my chest, hands dripping with some other guy's shredded gums. He calls in everybody to look and have a laugh. UPS man wants to know where he can get those Halloween vampire teeth. Doc gives me a script for Valium, says, *No refills, don't come back.*

I eat a handful, then wander out into the traffic of the arterial, screeching cars swerving all around, billowing smoke from braking tires, flailing arms flipping me off. *Isn't this nice*, I think, *all the pretty cars. I am Jesus walking through traffic. I love everybody.*

In two more hours, near the noisy chip bags in the grocery store, I become purple with irrational rage. Sweat beads on my face. *I NEED to KILL them ALL!!! Behead them, gut them, must wallow in gore and death! Hate, kill, dismember!*

I limp my brain out to the parking lot, and lock myself in the car. I just narrowly escaped grabbing the steak knife display and going berserk. Kinda yin/yang, these little yellow pills. I went from drooling idiot, to an ax murderer, in 120 minutes. Maybe I should have read the dose on the bottle.

Then this "cat incident" happened. My cries for justice in the letter to the Prosecutor went unanswered. As the last of my back teeth were fracturing, I appeared for the court date and took a seat in a pew. The pig Officer Snotty sat in a back row, grinning over his attempt to destroy what little remained of my life. Murder plans circulated through my mind like prime-time TV shows. Not something one should ruminate on when in a courtroom, but the Thought Police and their brain scanners are not fully on the job yet (except in airports).

The Judge is a huge man with a dog's face. His Honorable Judge Limerick. My turn on the docket comes up, alphabetically. *If you request an abatement, please make a statement*, said His Honor.

I mumble through my teeth, reasonably coherent. *It's all a hideous misunderstanding*, I whimper. *I meant no trouble, only cleaning up, not my cat. I offered my rowboat, am a respectable businessman, have pictures to prove it, the Prosecutor said he would plead my case . . .* Whimper, snivel.

His brow furrows at the mention of the Prosecutor. I instantly know I've made a grievous error, mentioning his obvious nemesis. I panic more, fighting off the urge to evacuate myself.

He begins: *Ah ha, the Prosecutor / wee shall see / before wee makes / our judicial decree.*

Then there is a loud noise as the Judge sucks in the rest of the air in the room. He stands to his twelve-foot height, seven feet wide. I am beneath a mountain of municipal magnificence, face to face with his shoelace. He continues:

*The final court date is now delayed,
The fines incurred are briefly defrayed,
Into the river did you callously fling,
The disgusting carcass, dead cat thing,
Now to this court, your punishment unpaid!*

He deflates. I leave a slug trail out of the room. Two weeks later I'm back in the hallowed Hall of Justice for the sentencing. Court is now in session. The Prosecutor is accidentally there to hang some scum, who bought vodka for children, then played nude musical chairs. The Mayor, I think. Lucky for him it's only a misdemeanor in this town.

The Prosecutor speaks eloquently on my behalf, I know not why. Some kind of lawyer's lapse into public service. The Judge is hard to convince that I won't lapse into recidivism, dump additional corpses into the river, like some cheap Mafia mammal movie. To keep me honest, I am sentenced to \$100 and 10 hours of community service. Judge Limerick makes his pronouncement:

*Serve the time for the community good,
 Help the people in your neighborhood,
 When you are done, you will feel better,
 Send me the details in a certified letter,
 Do the right thing now, as you should.*

*If you fail in this task I've given,
 For all the good, for which I've striven,
 Then the full fine, oh you must pay,
 Plus 15%, for delinquent days.
 Debt, my boy, ain't much of a living.*

Hence, my letter to the Judge two months later:

January 29, 2001
 Judge Limerick
 Municipal Court
 Astoria, OR

Dear Judge Limerick,

This letter is in response to your request that I notify you of volunteer community service that I have performed prior to February 1st.

My name is C.B., a resident of Astoria, and an active community member. I was involved in an unfavorable situation with a dead cat back in November and, after much travail, came before you to discuss the details of said dead cat, a misplacement of the corpse in the river, and a resulting phenomenal ticket presented to me. The last judgment, made in this matter by yourself, awarded me \$100 in court costs and 10 hours of volunteer service in the community. This letter, then, is to report on that community service.

As recommended by your court, I called the Woman's Center and offered my services as clerical worker: phone answering, odd job labor, computer training, or any other needs they may have had. My request to volunteer was treated with suspicion. It was inferred that this was an attempt to further abuse misfortunate women. My age, gender, and imagined criminality supported their suspicion. My phone number was taken, and a statement made that some other person would be contacting me. This was early December; I have never heard from them to date.

Next, I called the Senior Services Center and offered the same services as I had to the Woman's Center, along with driving services, yard work, wood chopping, or any other manner of mental or physical labor. Again, I was answered with suspicion. Con men, thieves, and perverts had preceded me. A cool statement was made that they would look into it and call me back.

Over the Christmas holiday, I drove out to Warrenton, and wrote down the number for Habitat for Humanity. I then called this number repeated times, leaving my contact numbers and a small verbal resume of my construction experience and carpentry skills. I have heard nothing from them. Despite their large sign inviting volunteers, I must assume they are fully staffed.

Following the advice of my wife, I then contacted a local Mental Counselor of great popularity. He deals with a wide range of clients, from old people to Vietnam vets. Following a half-hour talk with the Receptionist, I was assured that the Mental Counselor would contact me with some small chores in which I might assist. Apparently my confession of operating under the court system caused them to

evaluate me as crazy as any straightjacket walk-in. The phone line on this end remains silent to date.

Undaunted by such rejection of my skills, I learn that there is a State Volunteer Agency. To this, then, I go. It is mid-January now, with the clock ticking. I state my request for ten hours, and am given five pages of forms to fill out. There is also a Book of Jobs to volunteer for, and I write many of these down. The Secretary deftly files my paperwork, and informs me that it will be sent to the Capitol in Salem. Once the paperwork is received there, I may or may not be approved to volunteer, in three weeks.

I entreat that I merely need ten hours, and I ask: *is there not something that does not require criminal screening that I can help with?* The secretary says that she'll talk to the Director of the Agency and call me back. Three days later she calls me back and informs me that the Director believes I can be put to immediate use at the Community Action Center or the Food Bank.

I call the Community Action Center, from my job in Olympia. The Volunteer Coordinator is highly suspicious that I am asking for only ten hours of work. I explain that I have had a minor infraction for which I am mitigating. The Volunteer Coordinator then insists that my clearance through the State Criminal Clearing-house be confirmed, including fingerprinting. I must wait the three weeks.

I call the Food Bank. Here is a kindly person who is dedicated to distributing food, on weekdays only. I say that I would be quite happy to come in on a Monday, my day off. But she says that they are very amply staffed on Mondays.

I suggest that I can catalogue all the materials on the computer, and write tracking and record-keeping programs. Well, they have two donated computers, but nobody knows how to use them. *I will train them*, I say, *even if it takes 50 hours*. Well, *things have been working pretty well without them*, she says, *the computers kinda complicates everything*. She continues that maybe I should try some other volunteer leads.

I call the Gray Elementary School. They have listed that they want Reading Helpers and Assistants in the computer room. I ask to talk to the Principal. *She is no longer with us*, they tell me. *How about the current Principal?* I ask. *Might I speak with that person?* No, but they would be happy to take a message. I state that I can be of great value in the computer room, or alternately helping kids in reading.

The School Secretary is very hesitant and suspicious. *Do you have state clearance?* she wants to know. *Pending*, I say, *never been a criminal before*. Just a little white lie can't hurt much. *We'll call you*, she says. I can visualize the message on a pink Post-It note: *Jeffery Dahmer called and would like to help the children access pornographic sites on the Internet, and look up recipes for monkey meat. Interested?*

Silence reigns from the elementary school.

I call back the State Volunteer Agency. *What is the status of the paperwork?* I ask. *Oh . . . you again*, they say. *Well, we never actually sent that in, because it was so easy for you to volunteer at the Food Bank or the Community Action Center. Well, could you send in the paperwork now?* I ask. *No, we just threw all the forms out because it will be so easy for you to get ten hours of volunteer work. Everybody needs volunteers.*

At this point, I am feeling a little disillusioned and skeptical of the incessant public cry for volunteers that is blasted through the media. If this many public volunteer agencies cannot use a strong willing male with tutoring, carpentry, computer, and engineering skills, what exactly are they looking for?

I have at this point spent well over five hours and additional long distance phone costs to rustle up some volunteer action. I take a new approach. Calling the Astoria High School, I somehow manage to get through the gatekeepers and am put in touch with the Physics Teacher. I volunteer to give a demonstration of an operating hovercraft, and explain the mathematics of the same to the physics honors class.

Luckily, my name is associated with my children there at the school, who are very good students. The Physics Teacher wholeheartedly accepts my offer, and we arrange a two-hour class for January 29th.

I do not confess to my criminal infraction which, given past experience, may negate the deal. I then spend an hour preparing the hovercraft; an hour and a half preparing a curriculum; a half hour making copies of relevant equations and handouts; three-quarters of an hour loading and unloading the craft for demonstration; half an hour reloading and re-storing the craft; and the two-hour class itself.

The class is wonderful, the demonstration kinetic, the students are attentive and interested. The lights are on in their eyes. The questions are adept, near the point, and the Physics Teacher is pleased. I tell the students of the many opportunities opening up in this field, and that I will mentor any one of them or their friends wishing to learn more of the business and operation of hovercrafts. I also tell many stories, from the Human Fly to the Great Hovercraft Sinking of '96. This, then, has been a success.

Returning then to our original agreement, Your Honor, of ten hours of community service. I am not sure if I have fulfilled the appropriate hours in the appropriate way, but I surely have attempted to do so through all the normal channels and, ultimately by my own design.

At this time, I have been requested by my job to work five days a week, so henceforth will only have the weekend in which to further volunteer in Astoria. I will continue to encourage the youth, as I do frequently with demonstrations, rides, and explanations regarding hovercrafts. My shop doors are always open for any interested party, young or old, to learn what I have to teach about this technology. Hopefully my high school demonstration will result in future seniors mentoring with me in the study of hovercraft technology.

In light of these facts, I request to be released from my obligation to the Astoria Municipal Court System. Thank You.

C.B.

Best Coast Hovercraft Inc.
69 Main Street
Astoria, OR 97103
Cell Phone (360) 555-0100

By the time the letter was received, Judge Limerick had been fired for alcohol consumption on the bench, and retreated to Lincoln City to do sleaze private eye work in recreational condos. The court had no record of my arrangement with the Judge. I pleaded that I was also picking up trash along the highway, which was another lie. But, on March 23, I received a letter releasing me from all municipal encumbrance.

To date, I struggle to keep clear of the law and, aside from a few minor infractions, like carrying a grocery sack of *psilocybin* mushrooms out of the woods, and into the waiting arms of the State Police, I am a law-abiding citizen and standing member of the community. I avoided the shroom drug dealing charge by telling the pigs I was going to eat the whole bag and see God.

* * * * *





Digging

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

* * *

A Drink of Water

She came every morning to draw water
Like an old bat staggering up the field:
The pump's whooping cough, the bucket's clatter
And slow diminuendo as it filled,
Announced her. I recall
Her gray apron, the pocked white enamel
Of the brimming bucket, and the treble
Creak of her voice like the pump's handle.
Nights when a full moon lifted past her gable
It fell back through her window and would lie
Into the water set out on the table.
Where I have dipped to drink again, to be
Faithful to the admonishment on her cup,
Remember the Giver, fading off the lip.

* * *

The Harvest Bow

As you plaited the harvest bow
 You implicated the mellowed silence in you
 In wheat that does not rust
 But brightens as it tightens twist by twist
 Into a knowable corona,
 A throwaway love-knot of straw.

Hands that aged round ashplants and cane sticks
 And lapped the spurs on a lifetime of game cocks
 Harked to their gift and worked with fine intent
 Until your fingers moved somnambulant:
 I tell and finger it like braille,
 Gleaning the unsaid off the palpable.

And if I spy into its golden loops
 I see us walk between the railway slopes
 Into an evening of long grass and midges,
 Blue smoke straight up, old beds and ploughs in hedges,
 An auction notice on an outhouse wall—
 You with a harvest bow in your lapel,

Me with the fishing rod, already homesick
 For the big lift of these evenings, as your stick
 Whacking the tips off weeds and bushes
 Beats out of time, and beats, but flushes
 Nothing: that original townland
 Still tongue-tied in the straw tied by your hand.

The end of art is peace
 Could be the motto of this frail device
 That I have pinned up on our deal dresser—
 Like a drawn snare
 Slipped lately by the spirit of the corn
 Yet burnished by its passage, and still warm.

* * *

Field of Vision

I remember this woman who sat for years
In a wheelchair, looking straight ahead
Out the window at sycamore trees unleafing
And leafing at the far end of the lane.
Straight out past the TV in the corner,
The stunted, agitated hawthorn bush,
The same small calves with their backs to wind and rain,
The same acre of ragwort, the same mountain.
She was steadfast as the big window itself.
Her brow was clear as the chrome bits of the chair.
She never lamented once and she never
Carried a spare ounce of emotional weight.

Face to face with her was an education
Of the sort you got across a well-braced gate—
One of those lean, clean, iron, roadside ones
Between two whitewashed pillars, where you could see

Deeper into the country than you expected
And discovered that the field behind the hedge
Grew more distinctly strange as you kept standing
Focused and drawn in by what barred the way.

* * *

Mint

It looked like a clump of small dusty nettles
Growing wild at the gable of the house
Beyond where we dumped our refuse and old bottles:
Unverdant ever, almost beneath notice.

But, to be fair, it also spelled promise
And newness in the back yard of our life
As if something callow yet tenacious
Sauntered in green alleys and grew rife.

The snip of scissor blades, the light of Sunday
Mornings when the mint was cut and loved:
My last things will be first things slipping from me.
Yet let all things go free that have survived.

Let the smells of mint go heady and defenceless
Like inmates liberated in that yard.
Like the disregarded ones we turned against
Because we'd failed them by our disregard.

* * *

In Time

for Síofra

Energy, balance, outbreak:
 Listening to Bach
 I saw you years from now
 (More years than I'll be allowed)
 Your toddler wobbles gone,
 A sure and grown woman.

Your bare foot on the floor
 Keeps me in step; the power
 I first felt come up through
 Our cement floor long ago
 Palps your sole and heel
 And earths you here for real.

An oratorio
 Would be just the thing for you:
 Energy, balance, outbreak
 At play for their own sake
 But for now we foot it lightly
 In time, and silently.

August 18, 2013

* * * * *





Bags End Book #6: The Grand Scheme of Liberation!, Part 1

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

Deep in Mah Bed

Some guys live in fantasylands where most are nice & helpfull & all. Not your short but diligent pal Algernon Beagle. In mah homeland of Bags End, friends & enemies are usually found in one scary package after another.

Among the scariest is that real-live talking pillow named Betsy Bunny Pillow. Her story is famous & familiar.

Betsy was a big old rebel guy even when she was little & growing in the fields of Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm. She turned away from the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pillows, a song sung the night before pillows get picked from their growing fields, get cold, & don't talk no more. But Betsy ripped off the roots holding to her to the ground, & bounced away into the world, till she ended up scared & dirty in Miss Chris's front yard in

Bags End News
 No. 242 November 15, 1993
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Betsee Buny Pillo-ow! ow! ow!

Som gys liv in fantaseelands
 weer most ar nis an helpfull
 an awl. Not so yor short but
 filigint pal Algernon. In mah
 homeland of Bagzend frends an
 enemies ar uzellely fownd in wun
 skary pakeg aftr anothr.

Among the skeryest is that
 reediv tawking pillo namd Betsee
 Buny Pillow. Her storee is famus
 an familiar.

Betsee waz a big old rebbel
 gy evin wen she waz litel an
 groweing in the feelds of Farmr
 Jon'eses Buny Pillo Farm. She ternd
 away from the Midnit Song of the
 Buny Pillos song the nit betor thay

Connecticut.

And that's how she ended up in Bags End, of course. Miss Chris cleaned her up, named her Betsy, & gave her a nice blue pillow case dress with lots of bunnys on it. Betsy has been crazy & around ever since, trying to liberate the Bunny Pillows who still live in her homeland, grow, & get picked, & sold to rich people.

"So what, Algernon?" you say. "This story is famous & everyone knows it too," you add. "Dontcha got any new storys to tell about this time?" you talk some more.

Calm down, fella. As a stoutly devout beagleboy journalist, of course I do. Keep a leash on that impatience there, guy.

Now Betsy had already tried to make me go to see her about her latest plan to liberate her fellow Bunny Pillows from Farmer Jones. I rebelled & escaped briefly. Well, not again.

Deep in mah bed was I when a squadron of Advanced Allies came in the dark of night & fetched me. I don't like being fetched. I'm not a bone, ya know. O! Yuk!

They gently forced me to go see Betsy in the tree house she calls her headquarters-in-exile, whatever those are.

Now I have seen Betsy Bunny Pillow look big, fluffy, & scary before, but she was worse then ever. She had a black handkerchief wrapped around part of her, & a pirate's eye patch near it. She doesn't have a head or anything, but I still got the idea.

"Let me be, ya pirate pillow, you!" I yelled cuz I was scared but more annoyed about mah broked sleep.

Betsy said no words. She sat on the floor near me & said nothing for a long time.

"You don't like me, do you, Algernon?" she finally said in her whispery voice.

Hmm. "I would like you if you weren't mean always. And if you liked me back."

"You really don't like me, do you?" she said again with her voice a little louder.

Ut-o. "Sure I do."

"What I mean is, you have no regard for my bitter struggle with the forces oppressing my race!" Betsy whisper-screamed & made a lunging smother at me.

I rolled away from her plunge. "Leave me alone, you, you, you, pillow, you!"

Betsey stopped chasing me & calmed down again.

"Beagle, I have a story to tell your newspaper doesn't deserve. It's about the triumphant freeing of a people. It's about the vanquishing of a mortal enemy. It's about sacrifice for the greater good."

"Again?" I said.

Betsy retreated from me & returned with an Allie who handed me a piece of paper. I couldn't read it cuz it always get dim when Allies are around, & anyway I am still learning some of the ABCz.

So the shadowy Allie read the note to me. "Betsy, we know how hard you have fought for Bunny Pillows & we are now physiologically developed enough, some of us anyway, to help."

"What's that mean?" I asked.

"Shut up, beagle!" yelled Betsy.

The Allie read some more. "We are ready to work with you for this common goal. You must come to us, however. The Slavemaster keeps too close a

watch for any of us to escape. Please come soon. Signed, Revolution Pillows."

Well, what could I say? My first thought was, why is she telling me all this? My second was, what does she want from me?

"Why are you telling me all this?" I asked.

"You represent the press in this region, right?"

I nodded.

"I need you to make sure my race's story is told, whether there is victory or defeat," she whispered.

Fear like a breeze blew by my face. "What do you want from me?"

"You must come with me on this undercover mission to document it event by event," she whispered.

Yah, right. I almost laughed at the pirate-garbed Betsy when I noticed she was in mah way to the door. Mah escape seemed doomed.

"No, Betsy," I said.

Betsy bounced nearer to me.

"No," I said again, backing away from her.

"You must," she whispered.

"No," said me.

I was fearing for my very self when Betsy stopped & backed off.

"OK, beagle."

"OK what?" I asked.

"You can go," she said.

"Why are you giving up?" I asked, full of suspicion.

"Because you are not what I thought you were. You will not risk all for a good story. You are not in the grand tradition of hard-bitten, go-for-broke, anything-it-takes journalists," she whispered, calmly for her.

"What?"

"You are not a true beagleboy journalist!" she said, now whisper-yelling. "You're a fake!"

"I am so!" said me. I thought, since I made up the word beagleboy journalist, who is a true one if not me?

Betsy moved away from the door. "Please leave, faker," she whispered.

She got me. Now I didn't want to go. "Wait a minute, Betsy."

"If you don't go, I will have my Allies remove you," she whispered louder.

"OK! OK! You got me! I will do it, ya brain-filled, trick-mongering, crazed pillow!" I yelled.

Betsy was quiet again, like she was thinking over mah begging. Stupid tricky guys, I think-muttered.

"Very well. We will begin the Grand Scheme of Liberation immediately," she whispered.

"The what?"

"First, we must suitably outfit you for our work. Much is to be done."

I was soggy with many questions, but Betsy called her Allies to bring me home.

Still in the deep of the night, & here I was back in mah bed, but what had happened in the middle?

I didn't know.

Never too long a string of safe moments for your old pal Algernon.

Me & this pillow were gonna be spies or something, see?

Well, I saw.

I wished I didn't though.

Letter-Poem to Mah Newspaper

It was not long after this strange night that Mrs. El the Post-Mistress of Bags End brung me a letter-poem, right to where I sat in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch. She kindly offered to read it to me, since mah English skills weren't increasing at any noticeable speed. I include it here not because it is a good poem, like that Wordsworth guy, but because it shows how crazy Betsy is, & how her plans filled mah very bones with dread.

You will come with me,
I will work with thee,
Sneaky spys we will be,
Evil Jones he will not see,
We will pursue our decree,
Better times will come to be.

Bunny Pillows will be free!
Bunny Pillows will be free!
Bunny Pillows will be FREE!

His head we'll put on a T
With him we do not agree
He will cry loudly EEEEEEE!
As he is tossed & lost at see!

Bunny Pillows will be free!

-BB Pillow & Her Allies

Sneaky Times with Betsy Bunny Pillow!

One time mah good friend & adopted personmommy Miss Chris said that because I am a beagleboy journalist, I must always be on the cutting edge of happenings in Bags End.

I guess she is right because the latest Bags End happening only involves me because I write mah newspaper. I mean, Betsy Bunny Pillow doesn't like me & probably wouldn't ever want to have a adventure with me otherwise.

But here we were, about to have a adventure together. I had been taken in the night by her Allies to see her & she tricked me into going with her on her latest try to defeat Farmer Jones, & liberate all the pillows being grown on the Bunny Pillow Farm to be picked & sold when ripe enough.

The next day when I saw Betsy in school, I thought she would tell me more about her plan to defeat Farmer Jones. But she ignored me like she usually does, cuz I am a not-pillow.

An this went on 4or more days after that. I was getting annoyed cuz I know Betsy well enough to see she was enjoying mah confusion. She probably thought it made her seem more powerful & mysterious, but it didn't. I thought it made her more like a mean bully, & I started wondering if this story was gonna be worth the trouble.

Then one day I was almost ready to go after school to her secret hideout & tell her forget it. First I decided to go to Milne's Porch 4or a little while to sit in mah comfy armchair & mull it all over.

Bags End News
 No. 243 November 22, 1993.
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny.
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Sneekey Tims With Betsee Buny Pillo!

Wun tim mah good frend an adoptid
 persun momy Mees Chrees sed that beek
 awz I am a beegel boye jernelizt I
 must allwez bee on the kuting ege of
 hapenings in Bagzend.

I gess she iz rit becuz ~~the~~ ^{the} latist
 Bagzend hapening onlee involvs me becuz
 I rit a nuwz papr.

I meen, Betsee Buny Pillo dezent
 lik me an probubley woodent' evr want
 too hav an advenchur with me uthr wiz.

But heer we wer, about too hav
 a advenchur toogethr. I had bin takin
 in the rit biy Allis too see her an
 she trikt me intoo going with her on
 her latist triy too defeet Farmir Jones
 an liberat awl the pillos groing up on
 hiz farm only too bee pickt an sold.

I was barely through mah bedroom window & settled in mah armchair when the skies be4ore me got real dark, & a scary whooshing sound filled the air, & then a strange but familiar whisper roared all over.

"It is time 4or the destination of liberty to be realized! It is time 4or the oppressors to be hooked, stripped, & scattered!"

"Hey, Betsy, what do all those big words mean? An how did you make the sky go dark like that?" I yelled.

"Here's a word even stupid beagles can understand--NOW!" whisper-screamed Betsy.

It was just like that bully Betsy to yell mean words at me & make one word big & scary like it isn't usually really is.

I didn't move tho. I knew that Betsy would send lighting tricks & Allies by the barrel-full to capture me & bring me to her clubhouse. So I waited.

Betsy didn't come tho. Nobody came. Then, after awhile, I fell asleep. I dreamed I was in Princess Chrisakah's castle & we were playing in her bedroom. The funny thing was that I wasn't the usual beagle I am. An Crissy wasn't the usual girl she is.

"I am not a beagle!" I yelled, like it wasn't obvious. I smoothed mah dress & patted mah long hair out of mah face.

Crissy scratched her long furry nozebone & said, "I know, Algernon. Algernon? Algernon? Algernon?"

I waked up & there was girl-dressed Crissy before me on Milne's Porch! I quickly checked mah own body's state of affairs, & found the usual parts of me in their usual places.

"Hi, Algernon," said Crissy, softly friendly, but not big like I am used to.

"Hi, Crissy," I said, & got out of mah chair so she could sit in it & then I crawled onto her warm lap.

She was really quiet & not paying attention to anything or me either.

"Hey, Crissy, cat got your tongue?" I asked, cuz I had heard somebody call quietness that.

"Betsy wants me to transform you into a Bunny Pillow, so you can go with her on her mission."

"Me? A Bunny Pillow?" I cried. Then I remembered that mah beagleboy journalistic ethics would say yes to this.

"Well, OK," I said, thinking Crissy would be pleased she didn't have to argue me into it. She didn't get happy tho.

"Algernon, do you remember when we were Weeds together?" she asked.

I nodded. "That was kind of fun."

"But you won't like being a Bunny Pillow. It will make you feel sad," Crissy said, kinda sadly.

Here was another test for your old pal Algernon's enfeebled brainbone. I know that Crissy don't use her magic much, & if she did, & it made me sad, this would probably weep her out.

So I thought. I thought some more. I thought so hard, I thought mah brainbone would blow a fuse.

"Maybe I don't have to be a Bunny Pillow. Maybe people could just think I am a Pillow," came out of mah pooped brainbone through mah mouth.

"You mean a costume? I don't think that would work," said Crissy.

"No, I mean, um, if I moved along in a, um, cloud of trickyness that fooled people into thinking Pillow of me," I said.

Crissy looked at me like I had just hit a home run to win the Super Bowl. Good thing I am humble, which means modest & low to the ground, so her

proud thoughts flew clear over mah head.

"Those who know you won't be fooled, but those who don't will be! Of course! What a smart plan, Algernon!" Crissy said, all happy. Her smiling blue eyes were full of tricky lights so I knowed she liked mah plan for that reason too.

"So should we tell Betsy & then do it?" I asked.

"It's done," Crissy said.

Boy! Her magic could win the Olympics!

"I don't feel like a Bunny Pillow," I said.

"That's cuz you know you. Believe me, this plan will work," Crissy said, all trick-happy.

"What now?" I asked.

Crissy thought a minute. "Betsy has to give you Bunny Pillow lessons."

"What?"

"Algernon, you not only have to look like a Bunny Pillow. You have to act like one."

We climbed back through mah bedroom window, & side by side went to Betsy's secret clubhouse hideout.

Of course Betsy fussed & fumed over me & Crissy's plan. She didn't believe I would look like a pillow to anybody until she commanded an Allie --a new one, Betsy said, fresh from the Academy--took at look at me.

"Is this your brother?" the new Allie asked, & Betsy was all happy as she ordered the confused Allie to leave.

"We depart at dawn," she said.

That's when Crissy said no, cuz I needed Bunny Pillow lessons.

I thought Betsy would smother Crissy, but Crissy is a tough princess, & said if I didn't get proper training, she'd undo her trick.

I think Betsy was so full of herself she would have told me to take a hike. She didn't tho, cuz she knew I would write about her in mah newspaper, & this tickled her pink.

If someone told me I was gonna get Bunny Pillow lessons from herself, I would have laughed & laughed. But it was true. Betsy ordered me back the next day to learn some of her kind's secret ways.

The Grand Scheme of Liberation!

When I think about the loyal readers of mah newspaper, I know that most of them are not beagles. 4or that matter, most of mah readers are not Bunny Pillows too.

Still, it can't be hard to see that if a beagle looks into the mirror, he is not gonna see a Bunny Pillow somehow. Beagles are short, but even in their humbility they stand on 4 legs & try to stick out their nozebones as bravely as they can. Bunny Pillows are fluffy masses with no faces, & they whisper, & they're really some kind of furniture except please don't tell Betsy that or she will smother you.

The why of mah words is that to help Betsy liberate Farmer Jones's Bunny Pillow Farm, I had Crissy put a tricky Bunny Pillow cloud around me that strangers would see, & now I was gonna get Bunny Pillow lessons from herself.

Well, I am a beagleboy journalist, mah dear non-beagle & non-Bunny Pillow readers. I must get the story that leads the race in Bags End news, & this story was it.

Bags End News

DOUBLE ISSUE!

No. 244-245 November 29-December 6, 1993

Editor: Algernon Beagle

King: Sheila Bunny

Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Grand Finelly With Betsee Buny Pillo!

Wen I think about the loyel
reedrs of mah nuwzpapr, I no
that most of them ar not
beegels. For that mater, most of
mah reedrs ar not buny pillos.

Stil, it kant' bee hard too
seey that if a beegel looks
intoo the mirror he iz not
gonna seey a buny pillu sumhowe.

Beegels ar short but evin
in theer humbelitey thay stand
on 4 legs an triy too stik owt
theer nozbons az bravley az kan.

Buny pillos ar fluff mases
with no fases an thay wisper
an thayr reely sum kind of.

So, after school, a convoy of Allies found & led me to Betsy's secret hideout. Since I was going agreeably, it was almost like a parade.

Betsy, as I found her in the tree house she calls her headquarters-in-exile, looked amazing & ridiculous all at once.

On what she decided was the head part of her boneless fluffy body, she had a black scarf & pirate's eye patch. But that part I already had seen. The rest of her tho was covered in some kind of long flashy red & gold robe that had pictures of Bunny Pillows struggling for their freedom on it, at least Betsy in her crazedness imagined that.

"I am not wearing all that pirate's & king's robe stuff," I said, cuz I was unsure about all this anyway.

"You're not here to wear robes & patches!" Betsy whisper-yelled at me. "You're here to learn some rudimentary aspects of my race!"

"Does your race like to use fancypants English all the time?" I said, all grumpy. Betsy needs me. That gives me power. Unused to power, I misused it right away.

Bad move. I never should have tested the meager limits of Betsy's patience. Before I knew it, she was bouncing through the air & landing on me, patch, robe, & all.

"Help! Help!" I yelled. "A crazed Pillow is trying to snuff me out!"

"Listen, Beagle. If you don't help me, you are an enemy, & I will put you away for good," Betsy whisper-growled. She loosened her smother on me though.

"I don't want to get put away for good," I said.

Betsy got off me & retreated. "Lesson Number One: Bunny Pillows don't talk. They whisper."

"Why?" said stupid me.

Betsy bounced closer & said, whisper-yelled, "Because we are a captive race! Because the evil Jones doesn't sell us to talk! Because when we get ripe & picked, we get stiff & die! What else don't you know, you stupid Beagle!"

Trying to learn & save mah hide all at once, I tried to think of what Crissy would do.

"Betsy," I whispered. "If Bunny Pillows lose their voices when they get ripe & picked, does that mean, um, when they're free from Farmer Jones you will always pick them before they're ripe?" Boy! I wore out mah whisper almost with all that whispering.

For a minute, I thought she was gonna answer mah question. But I think she remembered about me being a un-Pillow, & she captured her words back just in time.

"Lesson Two is that Bunny Pillows don't walk, & they sure don't hop. They bounce!" said Betsy, & she showed me her bounce which I have seen already a lot.

"Bounce, Beagle!" she ordered.

I tried to bounce sort of. I thought that it's probably something that beagles don't do, & I was right. Mah bounce was a terrible thing indeed.

Obsessed Betsy of course yelled & got mad & ordered me to do it right. I failed time & again.

Then this crazed Bunny Pillow called in a regiment of big ol' Allies & they bounced me around the room. Being lifted up into the air by big brawling bruiser-like Allies is surely no Blondy float, let me tell you.

But maybe I learned a little. Even as I was being bounced around, I whispered mah whimpers for help, & mah protests at this whole thing. Betsy saw I was trying hard & what little like for me she has in her heart burned full throttle.

"Lesson Three is that you have to change your name," she said.

"I like mah name!" I whisper-protested.

"It is not a name for a Bunny Pillow," Betsy said in a almost nice voice for her.

I sighed. "OK, Betsy. An what name shall I have instead?"

Betsy was quiet & thinking hard.

"Halas," she whispered.

"Halas? What kind of name is that?" I whisper-near-talked.

Betsy bounced rather close to me & whispered, "It's Greek for Greece, the ancient land of freedom, you stupid Beagle!"

"Halas Bunny Pillow it is," I whisper-whimpered.

"We leave tomorrow morning. My Allies will get you," she whispered next, & then turned away like I was a TV program & I was over.

"Aren't there no more lessons?" whispered me.

"You bounce. You whisper. Your name is Halas. What more do you need to know?" she whispered harshly.

"But," whispered I.

"An why would I tell you anyway?" she whispered some more, looking at me like I was the despicable un-Pillow that I am.

So I left. Having a adventure with Betsy is scary & mean. At least Sheila Bunny is nice when you are exploring with her.

I don't know how, but it got around Bags End that I was setting off with Betsy on an important mission. I was treated with respect wherever I went, a new & disturbing thing.

Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow, this silly red-haired baby who thinks she is a army guy in the Army of the Babys, shook mah paw & called me a noble operative. I asked her what that meant, but just then she wet her diaper & started crying & I had to get her big sister Elizabeth to take care of her.

Leo the Dark Man, who is the Janitor of Bags End, said I was almost as brave as his comic book hero Action Man. He was gonna then tell me all about Action Man's latest adventure when I remembered I had to go, & went.

Mah silly bumping brother Alexander Puppy was all confused about where I was going. He thought it was a brave Bumping expedition against the anti-Bump forces. I asked that language-knowing guy Allie Leopard what all this meant, but he only smiled at me with his nice green eyes all sparkly.

Before bedtime, I went to see mah pal & adopted sister Sheila Bunny, who is the real Mayor of Bags End & also pretend King & Emperor & so on.

She was in her Throne Room, slouched down in her Throne, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & reading a book.

"Hi, Beagle," she said.

"Hi," said me.

"Tomorrow's the big day?"

"I guess so."

Sheila closed her book & looked into the belly of mah soul with her bright & somehow magical purple eyes.

"Be careful."

"OK," I said, & we looked at each other some more.

Then she opened up her book again. "Well, goodbye," she said, & I was forgotten.

I went to the Bunny Family's apartment, & into mah bedroom. Mah adopted mommy Pat came in to say good night, & she kissed me softly on mah furry forehead.

Strangely, I wasn't sleepy. So I crawled out mah bedroom window onto Milne's Porch, & into mah comfy armchair. I looked out into the darkness, but

there was nothing to see. I sat quietly for a long time, trying to make all mah bits of thoughts line up in a neat group, & army into one single thought. No luck. Dum draft-dodging bits of thoughts.

I love writing mah newspaper, but it always seems to land me in the middle of the scariest situations, even in Bags End. Is there another way to write a newspaper without all the scary parts full of bullying big guys? Good question.

I guess not, cuz it's usually the big guys who are full of big wants & big plans that little guys like me get drafted or bullied or slightly niced into going along with. That's the way it is, I guess.

I fell asleep thinking like this. Next waking thing that happened sounded & felt like a Bump. Only mah brother Alex could be the source.

"Bump?" he said, all friendly, wearing his pajamoz that have Bumps writed all over them.

I looked all around for Ally Leopard, but he was nowhere everywhere. I had to wing it.

"Hey, Alex! You better leave cuz Milne's Porch is covered with used-up English words!"

Alex laughed at me & said more Bump stuff. Beagles don't wing it too good, I guess.

"You're his hero for battling the anti-Bump forces, Algernon," said a sleepy & arriving Ally Leopard, who sat in the window politely, not like some, until I asked him onto the porch. Which I did with a friendly wave of mah paw.

"But I am a anti-Bump force!" I realized & cried all at once.

Before more of this sillyness could happen, the lights got dark again on Milne's Porch, & a group of shadowy Allies arrived. I was swept away even as Alexander went on saying more madeup Bump words. Silly brother.

Betsy's Allies have always been nicer to me than herself. They don't trounce me or threaten me or nothing. These Allies were just as nice. I couldn't tell if we were flying or not, & it was too dark to see anything. The whole trip didn't last long anyway. Suddenly I was gently plopped on a dirt road, & it was morning, & there was Betsy Bunny Pillow looking at me even tho she's got no face.

"Let's go, Halas," she said, and bounced 4orth. I did mah best to follow her in a bouncing way, but pretty soon she was far ahead of me & wasn't gonna stop & wait, I didn't think. I'm sure not really her brother even if I look like it.

The road was flat & long, but soon Betsy was just a bouncing speck in the distance. I gave up mah Pillow pretensions, & used mah short legs properly again to hurry along.

There wasn't much to see, dear readers, & I wondered if Betsy knew or cared that I was so far back. I decided that I didn't care about the story anymore, except maybe just a little, & was thinking about how to get home when I noticed a tall man down the road. We were walking toward each other, & getting bigger all the time.

Ramie the Toy Tall Boy? Rich Americus, mah guitar-playing friend? No.

He had on a big straw hat, & his clothes looked ripped around some. Then I knew & froze. Farmer Jones!

I was so shocked I didn't move from mah spot even as he came nearer, & then walked past me. I thought I heard soft crazy laughter too.

When he was gone, I runned very fast on mah short legs, & found Betsy plopped in the middle of the road.

"I waited for you, Algernon. I knew you would come," she whispered

near nicely.

"Hey! You called me by mah true English name instead of mah pretend Greekpillow name!" I said.

"Algernon, I want you to go see Princess Chrisakah, & have her undo her work," whispered Betsy nicely some more.

Remembering, I said, "Did you see Farmer Jones? Did you beat him up? Why did you let him get away?"

"He doesn't matter anymore. My people have risen up & cast him out," Betsy whispered.

"Why aren't you happy then? Do you think it's all a trick like those other times?"

"No. I must now go & assume my solemn duties in erecting the Bunny Pillow Free State."

I was crazy with ignorance. "Why are you sad?" I almost yelled.

Just as quietly, Betsy whispered, "Because the only thing Jones said to me when we met was that I had won, he had lost, but he had snuffed out a lot of Pillows before going down in defeat."

Betsy turned & bounced on with no more words. She went so slowly I could have kept up with her if I was going to. I wasn't tho.

Lucky 4or me Princess Crissy had been keeping track of mah travels, & so when I called for her help she magicked me right back to Bags End proper.

And here I am now on Milne's Porch, & days have gone by, & no word of Betsy Bunny Pillow has been heard.

I don't know what will become of her, or if she will ever be seen or heard from in Bags End again. I miss that faceless, whispering, bouncing, fluffy crazed Bunny Pillow. Me. Halas. Algernon.

Letter to Mah Newspaper

To: Algernon Beagle
Editor of Bags End News
Milne's Porch, Bags End

This singular missive is to in4orm habitants of my 4ormer land of exile of my well-being, & that of my newly liberated home, the Bunny Pillow Free State. My race sleeps this night as free as the endless starry sky above them. I am content, 4or the 1st time in my life. I miss none of you, as you belong to non-Pillow races. You will never hear from me or my people again. Tell Miss Chris I send greetings.

-BB Pillow

Some Thoughts from a Mushy-Hearted Guy

Why do things change? Why can't now be always & 4orever? Why can't we gather our favorite times all together in a neat group, & live inside their midst?

Betsy Bunny Pillow never liked me much. I am not a Bunny Pillow, 4or one thing. I guess that about covers it. I miss her tho.

Milne's Porch is a place I go to hide from the oncoming gallop of new times. But that doesn't mean they don't come. I just keep away from them for

awhile.

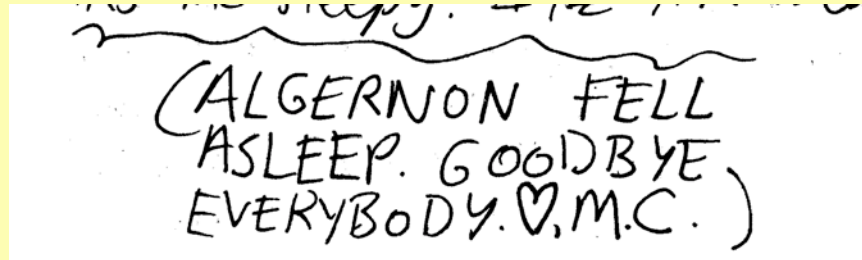
Will Miss Chris grow up & go away? Will Ramie the Toy Tall Boy ever become a real boy? Will Sheila finally discover the top or bottom of Bags End? Will the Blondys learn the Law of Grabitee, & float sadly back to Earth?

I don't know. You see, dear readers, even in fantasylands like Bags End, life goes on & things change.

Sometimes I will sneak from mah bedroom after bedtime & listen to the growed-up guys like Mister & Missus Bunny, & Mister & Missus El, & Mister Owl, talk in the Bunny Family living room. An they talk about these things. About old times, & things that used to be.

I tried to ask Sheila once about things that used to be. First she got really sad & then she got mad at me & kicked me out of her Throne Room. Then--

Hey! Miss Chris just came & I am writing this sitting on her lap. She is smiling all pretty & skritchng mah headbone. That makes me sleepy. I like it when-----



A Dirge Sung 4or Betsy Bunny Pillow

This is the story of how a secret sweet thing became a very annoying every day thing became a sort of secret sort of sad thing in the end.

I didn't know if anybody in Bags End would see the likes of Betsy Bunny Pillow's fluffy, whispering self again. Unlike most, I didn't get on with things & 4orget mostly about her.

No, sir. Many was the night when I would sit in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, hoping sleep was cruising mah way, & mah thoughts would turn toward Betsy Bunny Pillow.

I tried to imagine what it had been like for her when she arrived at the Bunny Pillow Farm, & first saw the results of her fellow Bunny Pillows kicking Farmer Jones out after a hard fight. Since she hadn't come back to Bags End, I could only guess that her stubbornness to make the Bunny Pillow Free State had carried her through it all.

I would see visions of Betsy crowned King, & sitting slouched down in her Throne, but that was probably too Sheila-like to be true.

Then I would try to hear Betsy singing in her sweet whispery voice with her people, singing deep in the night, pretty & sad. Singing was probably more the right thing with Betsy. Songs sweet & sad.

Could Betsy have really got what she wanted? Was this possible? Could she have got it?

I didn't think so, see. I didn't believe that it was possible. Demanding more of mah decaying old brainbone that I ought, I tried to flow down the difficult river of these thoughts to where they went.

Did Betsy want to be small again, a littler Bunny Pillow, wild, scared, held soft in Miss Chris's nice hands?

Bags End News
 DOUBLE ISSUE!
 No. 246-247 August 22-29, 1994
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

A Derge Sung for Betsee Buny Pillo

Thiz is the storee of howe a
 sekrit sweet thing becam a verree
 anoying evrygy thing becam a
 sortuf sekret sortuf sad thing in
 the end.

Wen lazt me an mah deer reedrs
 met, Betsee Buny Pillo, a flufy, skery,
 not verree nis too verree mencee
 gys fella, had finaly got her dreem
 ut liberating Farmr Joneses Buny Pillo
 Farm from Joneses an taking it ovr
 herself.

I didnt' no if enybudy in Bagzend
 wood evr seey the liks of her flufy
 wispering self agen. Unlik most, I
 didnt' get on with things an
 forget mostlee about her.

Did Betsy want to be almost a seed Bunny Pillow, not knowing nothing, pal, just growing toward the sun in the big sky?

Did Betsy want back the glory of her campaigns against Farmer Jones, failed, famous, foolish?

I don't know.

I had to stop thinking then, cuz I felt mah brainbone breaking apart. I scrunched down deeper in mah comfy armchair, & almost fell asleep when a nice voice tickled me awake.

"Hi, Algernon," said Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna.

"Crissy!" I said, all happy. I was gonna get off mah armchair so she could climb in it & hold me on her lap. But her smile stopped me, & instead she kneeled in front of mah chair facing me.

"How are you?" she asked nicely.

I wanted to talk words & words of mah sad plight, but words runned away on fast legs. I couldn't even have said Bump if I wanted to. Not that I did.

So I singed. I lifted up mah cracked voice & singed a little song for mah friend Crissy.

Betsy Betsy Betsy
I cannot 4orget
The rest all carry on
I cannot forget

Where are you & how?
Your shine is somewhere
Who are you now?
What of it all & you?

I cannot 4orget
I cannot 4orget
Betsy Betsy Betsy
The rest will carry on

I cannot forget

Princess Crissy smiled nicely & learned forward to hug & kiss me. I thought maybe we could be quiet 4or awhile, & watch the sky but, no sir, not in mah nutsy native land.

"I want a lwullabwy twoo!" said a baby's voice, followed by a baby herself crawling through mah window.

Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow! Had she ever been on Milne's Porch before? I didn't think so. I had hid from her there tho.

Lisa blinked at me grumpy. Sleepy but awake. She crawled over to Princess Crissy & into her lap. I didn't like this at all.

"Swing me a swong!" Lisa ordered.

"Listen, you, you, you infant you!" I yelled. "This porch is mah place & you are not welcome!"

"I order you to swing me a swong!" ordered Lisa, blinking at me.

Crissy patted Lisa's head & smiled at me. "You sing so nicely."

Well, that nice Crissy has the key to mah heartbone, & she used it. I didn't know what to sing. Maybe a marching song?

1! 2! 3! 4!
 March until your back is sore!
 5! 6! 7! 8!
 Who said a soldier's life is so very great?

A! B! C! D!
 Time to turn your tail & flee!
 E! F! G! H!
 Run Run Run from the marching cage!

Red! White! Yellow! Blue!
 Stand alone! Have your own view!
 Gold! Purple! Black! Brown!--

"I don't like thwis song! It mwakes me thwink of cwourt mwarshall, not sleep!" grouched Lisa-Marie as she scrunched around Crissy's lap, getting more comfy.

Now I was mad. "Tough noogies, ya babe in arms! I was having a really good non-military time until you showed up. Isn't it bad enough you're occupying one of mah favorite laps!"

Ooops. What was I thinking, be all brave out loud? Lisa crawled off Crissy's lap & came near to mah face.

"I am gwoing to thwack you, webel! It's twime you strwaightened up & flew wight!"

She tried to tackle me but I eluded her. Crissy came up & lifted her punch-throwing body into her arms.

"Algernon, please?" she said. She looked so sad & sweet.

Crissy rocked Lisa a lot till she was quiet, & sucking her thumb.

I tried to think of what to sing. If not marching, then what?

She likes sleep. Me too. OK.

Sleeping flying sleeping
 flying weeping
 no I don't think so

I am alone a flying
 stone a sweeping
 ton a spirit-it hon

Washing into sleep
 soaring downward creep
 clasped loved hugged deep

Clasped loved hugged deep
 washing into sleep

I guess Lisa fell asleep, but Crissy listened with a nice smile on her face. Her lap full of snoring baby, I sat next to mah comfy armchair near her. Exile from mah own place, that's me.

A nice Crissy hand reached down & skritchd mah head perfectly, & so it wasn't so bad.

Did I know a fad would start cuz I maked up some words & singed them? I guess not.

But the next night I was just getting hunkered down in mah bed when,

without knocking, came into mah & Alex's bedroom that Sheila Bunny, wearing her Miles Davis jazz pajamoz.

"It's my bedtime, beagle," she said, all importantly, like I really cared.

"You're in the wrong room," I said, a little grumpy.

"Where's my lullaby?" she demanded.

"Maybe it's crunched under your big ego!" I yelled. Stupid move, beagle. Civilizations have been crushed for such things, whatever that means.

Sheila hopped right up on mah bed, grabbed one of my long ears in her tight little paws, & said, "Your Emperor wants the same treatment you gave a lowly soldier in her vast armys. Is that bad?"

"Help! Ow! O! Mah earbone! What do all those words mean? Help! Ow! Get off me, ya crazed bunny!"

Sheila got off of mah bed but she didn't let go of mah earbone. She dragged me by mah poor earbone into her bedroom. When she was all set in her bed, she let go of me & shoved me off her bed onto the floor.

I sat there, dazed in pain.

"Sing. I am waiting," Sheila said, all calmly.

I didn't want to sing. I was very mad. I started to leave her room.

"Algernon, I miss Betsy a little too," Sheila said quietly.

I stopped. Sometimes that little bunny thinks really bigly.

Slowly I went back, & climbed onto Sheila's bed, & sat on the edge. She looked at me with sleepy waiting purple eyes.

So I began singing in mah off-key gruff voice.

Every time I saw you go on
with plans, crayons, ash cans
sails & whales & bails

An we never walked together
An we never hugged so blue
But I miss you
Wondering why, I miss you

I stopped singing. Sheila was sound asleep. I went back to mah room & was sad.

The demands for mah paltry voice grew more & more. Your old pal Algernon was a singing idle! Me? Yes, me! Fooey.

The low point came when I was niceguiltyforced to sing a lullaby to mah language-wastreled brother & unfortunate relative called Alexander Puppy while he rocked happily in Miss Chris's arms & laughed at all the silly stuff mah singing Bumpwords were supposed to mean!

You see, calm & not uptight readers, Bags End guys don't go too far sometimes, they R far out all the time!

What to do? I fled mah selfish demanding fans & got to Milne's Porch right after that dreadful Bump lullaby episode. It was late at night.

By mahself at last, I tried to remember why I had singed in the first place. Hm. Oh. It was cuz I missed Betsy of course.

Would she have demanded that I sing her a lullaby like the rest? Probably not. But of them all, Betsy cared the most about singing. Her big non-Pillow hero is John Cougar. Plus I had one time heard the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pillows. That was why I had thinked to sing in the first place.

A funny thought in a black bowler hat, wearing a green bowtie & yellow suit, came to mah brain just then.

Could I join in the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pillows while sitting

on Milne's Porch? After all, it was real late, probably near midnight.

How to do this, tho. Good question. I tried to remember all the things I know about Bunny Pillows to get as Bunny Pillow-ish as possible.

Just before I had gone with her to write about her last battle with Farmer Jones, Betsy had taught me the 3 lessons about Bunny Pillows. Lesson One, Bunny Pillows whisper, they don't talk. Lesson Two, Bunny Pillows bounce, not walk or hop. Lesson Three, I had to change mah name to Halas, which is a good Bunny Pillow name, not like Algernon. I like Algernon better, but that's cuz I'm a beagle, not a fluffy piece of sort of furniture.

Was this all helping? I didn't know. Give a go, I say. I tried to join in from mah faraway place in the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pillows.

"La La Lonk!" mah voice rose & then crunched.

"O rats!" I muttered.

Should I call for help? 4or the Blondys? Princess Crissy? Miss Chris? Sheila?

No.

She had said in her last letter to me & non-Pillow lands that she was well & sleeping content under the starry skies. I had hardly ever seen Betsy content. Mostly I saw her mad, & sometimes I saw her furious.

Except, what? When she was with Miss Chris in Miss Chris's TV Room in Connecticut, sleepy & watching a good TV program. Miss Chris's head was the only one legal to rest on Betsy.

So I thought about those times when I had been helded in Miss Chris's arms while she sucked her thumb & rested on Suzy Couch on Betsy, & we all were sleepy & watched a good program on TV.

An I looked up at the starsy skies. An, slowly, the song of the Bunny Pillows sung at midnight filled up mah lungs & mah heartbone. An I singed.

An I understood why I couldn't do it b4. The song was no longer sad. It was a happy dirge now!

Well, not happy. But not sad. I singed & floated bouncy, mostly Halas, just a little Algernon, & tried to get the why.

It was a song full of Betsy as it could be. It was full of her hope & her sadness & her restless bouncy ways. I singed with it & of it as long as I could, but then I had to stop.

Not meaning to do any beagleboy journalism, that's what I had done. I answered mah question.

Betsy was happy to have freed her people, but restless living with them. That's what the singing had told me about her.

Now I knew more than all the rest of Bags End. An I kind of felt sad. After all the time & try, she had won the battle with Jones, but not the one with herself.

But why not happy? Could it be that Betsy could make up the Bunny Pillow Free State, & give it to her long-suffering people, but not stay there herself?

I was getting too smart 4or mahself. One more big thought & I would probably start asking me what all that stuff meant!

I had to go & talk to Sheila right away. In the middle of the night. In the middle of her Royal Rest.

Your old pal Algernon must be a fiend 4or fear cuz somehow I left Milne's Porch, walked through mah bedroom, & went into Sheila's bedroom.

"Halt! Who goes there?" said a familiar voice in the dark, but not Sheila's. I peered hard & saw the ridiculous sight of Leo the Dark Man, dressed up in a fancy purple costume, standing all straight in front of Sheila's bed.

"Leo! Halloween is later!" I cried.

"I have been appointed Official Guardian of Her Highness's Royal Rest!" said Leo all proudly & big wordly.

"I have to talk to Sheila about Betsy! Let me by!" I yelled. I was gonna dash between Leo's legs when a sleepy grumpy Sheila voice said, "Let the doomed beagle pass, Official Guardian of my Royal Rest."

Leo got mad, & stomped his foot, and left. "Back to 3rd shift bubble gum scraping duties," he lamented.

"What do you have to say, before I let your air out?" said really mad Sheila.

Scraping the last bits of courage off the walls of mah fearful soul, I climbed up on Sheila's bed & leaned toward her purple eyes, shining in the night.

"Listen, Sheila, Betsy is not happy, & we have to go to the Bunny Pillo Free State, get her, & bring her back to Bags End," I said.

Sheila laughed so loudly, I fell off her bed.

"Sure, Algernon, right after I trade away all my good jazz records!"

"I thought you liked jazz!" I said.

Sheila got mad again, & I had to hustle mahself out of her room before she let me have it. I don't like it much.

And so began mah lonely crusade to save a Pillow from living bored in a place where everybody likes her, & bring her back to a place where nobody much likes her.

Dear readers, I ask, why me?

I Amm A Xil

I shoood evin giv mah papr a nuw title cuz I am not in Bagzend no more rit now. I stay in Konetikut with Mis Cris som an Imagiana with Princes Crisee som. I donte belong in eethr place so I have too go bak an 4th.

I havenent' dun mah papr 4 a long time cuz theer waz to much fiting going on an then I didente want too doo it no mor but Mis Cris & Crisee gangd up on mee an I givd in cuz I am a mad beegel but I stil hav a mushee hart.

Mah rode to Xil began wen I waz siting on mah Porch Milns Porch that iz an I had a vizhun uf Betsee wen I tryd too joyn her Midnit Song Off the Buny Pilows frum weer I sited. Mah vizhun waz that she waz pleezed too hav freed her fello buny pillos frum Farmr Joneses but waz not hapy being their King or Kween or watevr she is.

I told Shlela an she laffd lowd at mee. Nobudy in mah dum homeland wood beeleeve we shoood help her or that she needed us anymor.

I got so upset that I woodent bee nis too nobody an I woodent' go to skool an prity soon I woodent' evin leev Milns' Porch 4 enything.

I tryd too rit mor of mah nuwspapr but Shlela sensord it wich meens she told me it waz agenst the law. I didnt' ker but Shlela then stoppd mah frend an adoptid sistr an her reel sistr Lori frum riting it down awll neet 4 me an thay sortuf got in a brawl an Shlela cawled Lory No Brayns wich iz a meen siz of her niknam an Lory told her that freedum uf the pres waz werth a fit an Shlela nokd her litel riting glases awff an Lory gav Shlela a sok in the jaww and Shlela yelled & yelld an sed I waz the dum free pres an Mizzez Buny comd into mah roome an saw us fiting on Milns' Porch weer we wer biy the way an Shlela tryd too shov me ovr the rayling an it waz a reel mes cuz Shlela got punishd by beeing told no thron room 4or yu 4or a munt

~~Bagend~~ Nuwz
 Numbr 2,48 Janu, 14, 1995
 Edited an Writtrn down by
 Algernon Beagle
 Kings n.

I Amm. A Xil

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 but Mis Cris an Crisee gangd up
 on mee an I givd in cuz I
 am a mad beagle but I stil hav
 a musher hart.

Mah rode too Xil began wep

an Lory got told that she coodent' neetlee rit doun mah papr an I wood hav got punished to but I skeemd at every! too get awff mah Porch!!!! !!!! !!!! !!!!! an thay runned cuz I told them I wood jump awff if thay didnt an then I waz alon 4or a long tim an I criyed mor an my por bumping bruthr tryd too com an bee nis too me but I skreemed at him an he went away crying to an I criyed an I sleepd som mor & then I stopd cuz I thawt about Betsee an I jes sat a long tim til Mis Chris cam an told me too kom with her cuz Shlela had xild me frum Bagzend an sed I bettr get owt or she wood smot me with her magikel perpel iyes an so I went with Mis Chris too Konetikut an I liv with her eksept wen I go too liv with Princes Crisy wich is the othr haff uf the tim an that's mostlee the hol storee.

I am riting this mahself cuz I dont want Mis Chris or Princes Crisy in eny mor trubel than thay ar allredy 4or sheltering mee. This iz mah papr an evin tho I ammad at Shlela an the othrr dumm guys in Bagzend that plas is mah troo hom an I am itz kronikler wich meens that I rit the nuwzpaper.

Mis Cris told me that 4 awil Shlela tryd her own newspaper calld The KINGS Royel Trooth but nobody likd it cuz it mad Shlela look like a big shot awll the tim an Lory refused too copy it out neatly an Leo the Dark Man refused too deliver it lik he usd to do with mah papr evin wen Shlela thretend him with her Royel Rath.

The hol trubel iz that Shlela desent want Betsee bak tooo much an thinks I am crazee about Betsee not beeing happyy.

"You nuts, beegel. Az a King myself I can say that nothing beets it. Lik mah favrit poet sez

Beeing the King
is Everything
The nexxt best thing
is nothing.

But that's your poem!" I criyd.

"Yes" she sed proudly an she puffd owt her litel chest.

Nowe I wood hav lookd 4 Betsee enyway but the way too the X-Farmr Joneses Buny Pillo Farm wich iz nowe the Buny Pillo Freee Stat iz throo a doorr in a halway in Bagzend and Shlela that dum bunny whoo is not reelly King lik Betsee whoo izent a King or iz or iz a unhappy wun or sumthing enyway she lokkd the dor with thoz dum perpel iyes uf herz an I coodent get in. Dum buny.

But I am doing mah nuwzpaper agen an thatz good an maks me feel a litel hapy so maybe I wil reech Betsee aftr awl.

Princes Crisy an Mis Cris ar reel sad about awl this fiting among theer frends an thay keep kaling themselves the diplomatik kor wich in reel English meens thay ar trying to solv the fit an mak us awl at pees agen.

I told Mis Cris the diplo that until Shlela wood let me look 4 Betsee an bring her hom too Bagzend if she wantd I wood stay in XiL!

Shlela told Princes + Diplo Crisy that I waz crazee and az King she cood say no.

So thatz it. Sory I am so grumpee, deer reeders. Wel, I got no reedrs reeley. I meen, Crisy an Mis Cris will reed this if they kan figger owt mah pau skratchings. So, sorry Crisy an Mis Cris.

Visitors to My Exile? Not a One.

It's funny that just as Betsy stopped being in exile, I started. And I started because I didn't think her unexile was making her too happy. Would she be happy back in Bags End? Would that make her in exile again? Is Farmer Jones in exile since he got thrown off his farm? A lot of questions and I don't know.

Princess Crisy is writing down this issue cuz she said I was too upset over doing the last one myself. I said it would get her in trouble but she said she was my loyal follower and would stick by me. When I said OK Miss Chris said she wanted to do the next one cuz she loves me too and her and Crisy are twins sort of and so have to do things the same. I was confused and said yes to make her happy and so she would talk about something else instead.

If my newspaper is ever read by more than Miss Chris and Princess Crisy I may get asked about how come I could go too Imaginanna which is through a door in Bags End but not go through the door that would lead to Farmer Jones, ex-Farmer Jones Bunny Pillow Farm I mean.

Well, the reason is that Crisy is a magic girl and she can do a lot if she sets her mind to it. But she is stubborn too.

"How come you won't do your magic to send me to Betsey like you do to bring me between here and Conetikut?" asked me.

"Because that's different" she said.

"How?" said me.

"Because you want to bring her back too Bags End and you can't right now"

"What if she would go with me? I bet Betsey would fight Sheila and Betsey's got Allies too and other bunny pillows and stuff!" yelled me.

Crisy looked at me sadly with her face that likes me. "Algernon, you're an exile from Bags End now. You can't go back. So I can't let you go to see Betsey."

When I saw Miss Chris and we were sitting on Suzy Couch in her TV room, Ramie asleep with Miss Chris's other brothers on Freddy Couch, I asked her this too.

"I thought Bags End belongs to you!"

"Sort of, A wa wa"

"So tell Sheila what to do!"

"I can't. She's my friend"

"I'm your better friend!"

Miss Chris gave me an extra long hug to calm me down.

I wondered why I never saw any Bags End friends in Conetikut or Imaginanna. I was even scared to see Sheila cuz I thought she would smother me.

But not her. No Alexandr. No Lory. Nobody.

"How come?" I asked Crisy.

"Because MC and I are protecting you" she said.

"Who's MC?" I asked suspiciously.

Crisy smiled tricky.

It turned out that Princess Crisy and Miss Chris were trying to get Sheila to unexile me and then let me go to see Betsy.

The first part was not too hard. Sheila likes me, sort of, and she didn't like making Crisy and Miss Chris upset.

The second part she wouldn't budge on. She said that Betsey had chosen to leave Bags End to rule her own people and had made it clear to Sheila that un-Pillows were not allowed in the Bunny Pillow Free State. "She even dismissed her Allies!" said Sheila.

When Crisy and Miss Chris got me to do my newspaper again I said that

Bags End News

249 January 21, 1995

Editor: Algernon Beagle
 Written Down By: Princess Crisakah,
 fan of P.E.N. and Ruler of
 Imaginaria

Visitess to My Exil? Noth a Wun.

It's very funny that just as Betsey stopped being in exil I started. And I started because I didn't think her unaxil was making her too happy. Would she be happy back in Bags End? Would that make her in exil agen? Is Farmer Jones in exil sinze he got throne off his farm? A lot of questions and I don't kno.

Princess Crisy is Writing down this issue cuz she sed I was to upset over doing the last one myself. I said it would get her in troubel but she said

I liked to compose, that means think and write, on Milne's Porch. Last week I had rited in Princes Crisy's bedroom while she danded to the R.E.M. records she has.

This week Crisy showed me a surprise outside the back door of her castle. A porch! It had a comfy chair and I betted in my thoughts that Crisy had put in magik stuff that I would find out about.

Crisy's friend and servant Boop who looks like a turtle but isn't came to see me. He stood in the doorway. He looked nervous.

"Come on out, fella!" I said in my friendly Algernon way.

Now Boop looked even more nervous. With his eyes looking to the ground he said "I want you to know that I hold you in my personal high esteem even tho you are an exil, a criminal if you step onto your native soil."

Well alot of those words were beyond me, fancypants English but I know what criminal means. It means bad guy.

"I am not a criminal!" I yelled. I guess I scared Boop cuz he runned away and I haven't seen him since.

So I was sitting on the porch which Crisy wants to call 1928 Paris. I am no closer to helping Betsey. I won't go bak to Bags End tho. Sheila has gone too far and I don't like it.

What would happen if I did go to the Bunny Pillow Free State? Would Betsey even tell me she isn't happy there? Why would she tell me anything?

And what about Farmer Jones? He was defeated and chased away. I saw him last of everyone and he was in bad shape.

Crisy is writing this down. I think I will surprise interview her.

"How is Farmer Jones?"

"I haven't checked, Algernon"

"Can I go to see him?"

"Why?"

"Maybe he can tell me something. Maybe I can help him."

"But isn't he a bad guy?"

"Crissy, this is all very complicated!"

"I know"

"If Betsy leaves her Free State who will make sure the pillows grow well?"

"Other pillows?"

"But do they know how?"

"I don't know. Does Betsey know how to grow bunny pillows?"

"I don't know"

"We have to go, Crissy! Don't you see?"

"I don't know, Algernon"

"Talk to Sheila and tell her all this. Please?"

"OK."

I have to keep trying. I have to be determined!

Read Part 2 in Cenacle | 98 | December 2016!



* * * * *





A Brief History of LSD in the Twenty-First Century

[Essay]

*This article first appeared in the Psychedelic Press UK Journal (June 2015 Volume III):
An issue dedicated to the history and literature of psychedelics, and in particular LSD.*
<http://psypressuk.com/2015/07/07/a-brief-history-of-lsd-in-the-twenty-first-century/>

Since Swiss scientist Albert Hofmann accidentally discovered LSD's psychedelic properties in 1943, a plethora of books, news articles, film documentaries, academic papers and conferences about the substance have seen the light of day. Add to that numerous artistic expressions—artworks, designs, films—that feature references to acid. It is simply fair to say that interest in LSD has been huge. However, most of the activity took place in (or is focusing on) the twentieth century. One may even get the impression that acid is a historical phenomenon that barely exists today. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the past 15 years have seen many important developments in connection with LSD.

My first contact with LSD culture came primarily through the Scandinavian rave scene of the late 1990s. Had I been born in another time and place, my encounter with Hofmann's potion—had it happened at all—would have been completely different. It should also be said that my perspective as a writer is that of a white male in his early forties living in Sweden, which of course has influenced my approach to writing the article. When discussing LSD culture, one should keep in mind that it is a global, multifaceted and loosely connected movement, and few, if any, psychedelic researchers can claim to know the full story of what has happened during the past decade and a half. Yet what follows is an attempt at outlining some of LSD's recent underground as well as above ground use.

At the turn of the new millennium the future looked somewhat bleak for LSD. In his book *Albion Dreaming*, UK acid historian Andy Roberts says that during this time public interest in LSD was at an all time low, and that LSD appeared to be yesterday's drug.¹ Indeed, there was a major drop in availability of underground acid in the early twenty-first century, at least in the States.² It is generally believed that the drop had to do with a particular event, namely the seizure of an LSD lab in Wamego, Kansas in 2000, which led to the draconian conviction of William Leonard Pickard and Clyde Apperson, now serving two life sentences and 30 years in prison, respectively.

The event has become known under several different names including the Wamego bust, the Pickard bust, and the Kansas missile silo bust. The latter comes from the fact that the laboratory was stored in a renovated Atlas-E missile silo owned by Gordon Todd Skinner, a drug aficionado and con man moving in psychedelic circles. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Skinner decided to become a DEA informant and revealed the laboratory to the authorities. He received total immunity and was never charged for his involvement in the case. Incidentally, Skinner is now serving life plus 90 years for kidnapping-related charges.³ Titled "Operation White Rabbit" by the DEA, the Wamego bust is described by the agency as the largest LSD manufacturing case in history. Yet according to Erowid, the scale of the laboratory's production appears to have been vastly exaggerated.⁴ Many of the details surrounding the case nevertheless sound like something out of a crime novel.

Leonard Pickard was an academic already in his mid-fifties when he was arrested in 2000. In an

SFGate article published that same year, he comes across as a somewhat unlikely figure to end up with two life-sentences for the large-scale manufacturing of LSD. Described by Mark Kleiman of UCLA as “a character out of a Pynchon novel,” Pickard is portrayed in the piece as a non-smoking and non-drinking vegetarian who runs marathons and practices yoga. According to Kleinman, Pickard is also a “superbrilliant chemist.” In the mid-1990s Pickard won a Harvard fellowship to study drug policy and addiction, and as the deputy director of the Drugs Policy Analysis Program at the UCLA in the late 1990s, he helped track the emergence of new street drugs in Russia.⁵ Although Pickard has a history of drug related arrests and convictions that go back to the mid-1970s, he has never made a confession in the Wamego LSD case.

Following his arrest in 2000, Pickard received backing by some seemingly unexpected characters, including the two “British aristocrats” Lord James and Lady Amanda Neidpath, the latter better known as Amanda Feilding of the Beckley Foundation. In a letter to the court the two vowed that Pickard was trustworthy: “We find it difficult to believe . . . he can be involved in anything criminal.”⁶

It seems most people, even within psychedelic culture itself, have accepted the Wamego bust as the main reason why there was an LSD shortage in the early 2000s. “The best explanation is a bust, a really big bust,”⁷ wrote Ryan Grim about the LSD drought in his article “Who’s Got the Acid” published in *Slate* magazine in 2004. There is, however, reason to be a little critical towards this popular, and not to mention media-friendly, explanation. Although it appears the Wamego bust was something of a blow to acid culture in the early twenty-first century, at least in the States, there are several additional factors that may have strongly contributed to the acid shortage.

In his piece “International LSD Prevalence: Factors Affecting Proliferation and Control,” written by Pickard by hand from prison and presented by writer and Mind States conference co-founder Jon Hanna at the World Psychedelic Forum in Basel in 2008, Pickard says that the drop in LSD availability partly had to do with the great influx at the time of MDMA, which he believes had a displacement effect on LSD use. According to Pickard, another major reason for the shortage of LSD in the early 2000s—which actually had been in steady decline since 1996—had to do with difficulty in obtaining one of the key materials used by chemists when producing LSD, namely ergotamine tartrate (ET). Since the early 1990s, ET is subject to strict controls in most countries. “This synthetic bottleneck, the dependency on ET supply, may be the most important single factor affecting proliferation of clandestine laboratory sites,”⁸ wrote Pickard.

In 2000, Federal, State and local forensic laboratories in the U.S. analysed 1,785 exhibits of LSD. The following year the number was down to 1,368, and in 2002 a mere 198 samples were analysed. Although there is no arguing that this was a remarkable drop, most people discussing the U.S. LSD drought rarely mention the fact that availability of the drug actually increased throughout the decade. After having remained low for a couple of years, the number of LSD exhibits that were analysed slowly increased to 844 in 2007.⁹ While this number is relatively low compared with what was seen in 2000, it nevertheless shows that there was still an existing American LSD culture at the end of the decade.

According to the DEA, very few labs are responsible for the worldwide LSD production. In 2010, they stated that, “A limited number of chemists, probably less than a dozen, are believed to be manufacturing nearly all of the LSD available in the United States.”¹⁰ However, according to Pickard it is more likely there are many small labs operating that are less easily detected and easier to move. In his paper, Pickard mentions Casey William Hardison as an example of someone who was running one such small lab. The latter made LSD and other psychedelics in a lab that would fit into a bedroom.

Despite the shortage in the early twenty-first century, there were certainly many people who continued to take LSD. For example, this was evident by the appearance of “Hofmann Millennium” around 2000, a reissue of a blotter LSD from the mid-1990s. The blotter features an illustration of a smiling Albert Hofmann taking his legendary LSD bicycle ride in the Swiss countryside, complete with a snow-clad mountain in the background. Already a classic, the image has become one of the most well-

known examples of blotter art produced over the past decades, and, besides having appeared on t-shirts and other commercial products, un-dipped “vanity” blotter can be bought online. Clearly, there were enough acid enthusiasts out there to make sure LSD would survive into the new millennium.

In the early 2000s, LSD was also present in art. For example, in 2000, British visual artist and art world superstar Damien Hirst, believed to be one of the wealthiest living artists in the world, made an artwork titled *Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD)*. The motif, which features a number of coloured dots, has been reproduced on several commercial products including an “LSD” iPhone case, making sure your phone is always on acid. Another artist taking interest in LSD in the early twenty-first century was Rodney Graham. In his 2001 film *The Phonokinetoscope*, Graham made a re-enactment of Albert Hofmann’s original 1943 LSD bicycle ride. Naturally, the artist himself was on acid while making the film. Although many of today’s psychedelic artists take inspiration from a wide range of mind-altering substances, including plant-based psychedelics such as ayahuasca and psilocybin mushrooms, LSD continues to be used for artistic purposes in the twenty-first century. For example, visionary artist Luke Brown sees LSD as his probably most consistent influence,¹¹ and several artists featured in the art book *Juxtapoz Psychedelic* (2013) list acid as a source of inspiration.

The early 2000s also saw the release of Connie Littlefield’s excellent documentary film *Hofmann’s Potion* (2002). Using the tagline “The story of ‘acid’ before it hit the streets,” it featured unique interview material with Hofmann and other senior key figures in psychedelia. And when it comes to literature on psychedelics, Marlene Dobkin de Rios turned to the subject of LSD in her 2003 book *LSD, Spirituality, and the Creative Process*, which was based on Dr. Oscar Janiger’s LSD research in the 1950s and 1960s. Looking at acid and its accompanying culture from a broader perspective in the early 2000s, its influence was also still very much seen in psychedelic manifestations such as the, at the time, recently started Boom Festival in Portugal, and of course the Burning Man festival in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert.

Moving on to the mid-2000s, LSD again made the news when the aforementioned Casey William Hardison, an American living in Britain, was arrested in February 2004 for making psychedelics. Alongside DMT and 2C-B, Hardison manufactured LSD. Interestingly, just like Pickard many years earlier, Hardison was an active figure in the psychedelic subculture, and in addition to attending psychedelic conferences he wrote articles for MAPS and Erowid. Talkative and quick-witted, Hardison acted as his own lawyer during his trial. Being an advocate of cognitive liberty, he argued that it was his human right to use entheogens. His arguments were rejected, and after an eight-week trial Hardison was convicted in March 2005. As is usually the case when it comes to LSD, the sentence was stern: in April 2005 Hardison was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in the United Kingdom.

Illicit drug manufacturers are generally seen as unscrupulous and greedy individuals with no morals by society at large. Yet it is safe to say that Hardison was an acid idealist with a strong belief in LSD’s transformative potential who became yet another victim of the War on (some) Drugs. In a recorded message played at the World Psychedelic Forum in Basel in March 2008, Hardison, at the time four years into his sentence, made sure to remind the audience that, “It is easy to forget that the majority of those present in this forum, who have tasted Albert’s Problem Child and Wonder Drug, LSD, probably did so via the flask of a chemist who was risking severe restrictions on his or her liberty simply to bring the blessed entity, LSD, into existence.”¹²

During the years leading up to his release in May 2013, Hardison became something of a legend in his own time, at least to some people in the inner circle of contemporary psychedelia. A website titled Freecasey.org was launched, making sure his case was not forgotten, and after he was released he appeared on the Dose Nation podcast and was interviewed live via Skype by his wife, psychedelic researcher and cognitive liberty advocate Charlotte Walsh, during the 2013 Breaking Convention conference. Appropriately enough he was also back writing for Erowid.

So what motivates an individual such as Casey Hardison to manufacture LSD? The answer might lie in the drug itself. It is my guess that the vast majority who make acid have had powerful

transformative experiences themselves, and want to give others the opportunity to reach similar altered states of consciousness. Hardison, an alcoholic from the age of 14 who found his way to the 12 steps of AA, first took LSD on a cold night in December of 1993. It was a solid dose of approximately 250 micrograms, and during the trip he experienced oneness of all things. “Perennial wisdom dawned and my heart burst forth in praise, gratitude and love, rooted in a mindset of compassion for self and other,”¹³ he eloquently wrote in his piece “(A Brief History and) Motivation of an Entheogenic Chemist.” Needless to say, acid made a huge impact on Hardison. So much so that he made a commitment to himself that he would synthesise LSD.

In late 2003, ten years after his first acid trip, Hardison was given “a mass of dark resinous material purported to be ergotamine tartrate (ET).”¹⁴ ET, as you may recall, is the sought after material used by underground psychedelic chemists for the purpose of making LSD. In February 2004, after having failed repeatedly in his attempts, Hardison succeeded in making LSD from the ET he was given. “In ordinary circumstances, I might have been awarded a novel synthesis patent; instead, I was awarded a twenty-year prison sentence.”¹⁵

So far, this article has discussed LSD made by underground chemists, and for obvious reasons people who use street acid very rarely know the dosage and purity of the substance they are about to ingest. Occasionally, it is also discussed whether or not street acid actually contains any acid. However, when it comes to the mid-2000s, it seems the vast majority of the substances that were sold as LSD blotter or microdots did in fact contain LSD. A 2005 analysis carried out by the Spanish Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency showed that LSD was indeed detected in all the samples that were tested. Eleven of the samples had their place of origin in Spain and an additional six originated from Switzerland. Interestingly, the quantity of LSD found on the samples was very low.

Two of the blotters, “Marilyn” and “Pink Triangle”, only contained 19 micrograms of LSD each, and the three microdots in the analysis each contained between 20 and 26 micrograms. Of the 17 samples, eight of them contained less than 30 micrograms. The sample with the largest quantity of LSD in the study contained 102 micrograms.¹⁶ If the latter sounds like a large dose, one should keep in mind that a common dose in the sixties counterculture was about 250 micrograms. Many of the blotters and microdots in the Spanish analysis contained threshold doses, which only produce mild, sometimes barely noticeable, effects of the drug. The lowest doses that were found in the Spanish analysis were in fact equivalent to the ones used when microdosing LSD. It is also common that a single blotter LSD is cut in pieces and shared between users, which, if it is weak to begin with, makes the drug little more than a placebo.

Paradoxically, low doses of LSD can sometimes produce anxiety.¹⁷ Generally speaking though, when people are taking acid recreationally in crowded settings such as nightclubs and festivals, where many other drugs such as MDMA, amphetamine, cannabis, and alcohol are used as well, low doses most likely prevent many difficult experiences, and as the former LSD chemist Tim Scully pointed out in 2003, “One blessing of the small doses popular now is that extreme bad trips are more rare.”¹⁸

When it comes to the Spanish analysis, one also needs to consider the handling of the 17 samples. Needless to say, poor handling by street dealers/users or those who carried out the analysis may very well have affected its outcome. Once LSD is added to a sheet of blotter, it is extremely sensitive. According to Scully, blotter is a “very bad distribution method since it leaves the acid vulnerable to rapid decomposition,”¹⁹ and his old colleague, the legendary LSD chemist Owsley Stanley, wrote in an email exchange with the present writer in 2003 that, “Blotter is not even stable for 30 hours. Deterioration commences as soon as the liquid carrier is soaked into the paper.”²⁰ Hence, many of the LSD blotter samples that were used in the Spanish analysis may in fact have been more potent when they were fresh from the lab. That said, it is still safe to say that LSD doses in the twenty-first century are generally considerably weaker than they were in the drug’s early days.

In the case of LSD and other psychedelics, the subject of dose is often overshadowed by set and setting. While the latter two are extremely important for the outcome of the psychedelic experience,

dosage can make all the difference too. As has already been mentioned, the low doses that have been prevalent in underground LSD culture in the twenty-first century have most likely prevented many emergency room visits. Yet it has also resulted in a generation of threshold trippers who sometimes have a poor understanding of LSD's transformative and therapeutic potential. Clearly, ingesting a threshold dose is very different from taking a medium to high dose, and in order to utilise LSD's visionary and healing effects, it is questionable if these are obtainable in situations of low-dose use.

Like any other movement, LSD culture has its own pioneers and celebrities. The first 15 years of the twenty-first century have seen the passing of several of these characters including Merry Prankster Ken Kesey (2001), psychiatrist and LSD researcher Oscar Janiger (2001), psychiatrist Humphry Osmond (2004), author Laura Huxley (2007), underground acid chemist Owsley Stanley (2011), author and psychedelic researcher Myron J. Stolaroff (2013), and author and orator Stephen Gaskin (2014). In their own unique way, these people are forever part of the history of LSD. In addition to the ones just mentioned, the 2000s also saw the passing of one of psychedelia's most celebrated characters, Dr. Albert Hofmann. When the Swiss scientist died in April 2008 at the age of 102, his discovery had affected millions of people worldwide. Needless to say, LSD took on a life of its own early on, and during his lifetime Hofmann saw how the drug he discovered was adopted by scientists and academics, followed by various subcultures including the hippie counterculture, the Deadhead scene, and parts of rave culture.

Besides a number of vibrant LSD subcultures, Hofmann lived to see how psychedelics, through the strenuous efforts of organisations such as MAPS, Beckley Foundation, and Heffter Research Institute, were beginning to find its way back to science. So, even if LSD seemed like yesterday's drug at the start of the new millennium, it was clear that by the mid-2000s, Hofmann's potion still had quite a following. This was evident by the appearance of a 2006 conference in Basel celebrating the Swiss scientist. Titled "LSD: Problem Child and Wonder Drug: International Symposium on the Occasion of the 100th Birthday of Albert Hofmann," the three-day conference attracted over 2,000 visitors from 37 countries. More than 80 experts delivered talks on the subject of LSD, and besides Hofmann himself, the speaker list included most of the who's who of contemporary psychedelia. If anything, the event was proof enough that LSD had survived into the twenty-first century.

As the years went by in the new millennium, there were many signs of a growing interest in LSD. Several retrospective works discussing the drug appeared in the late 2000s, including the 2008 books *Psychedelic Psychiatry* by Erika Dyck and the aforementioned *Albion Dreaming* by Andy Roberts. The late 2000s also saw the release of the film documentaries *Peyote to LSD* (2008) and the National Geographic Explorer film *Inside LSD* (2009), the latter narrated by actor and former Digger Peter Coyote. LSD also made a cameo in Gaspar Noé's DMT inspired 2009 film *Enter the Void*, which features wise words or platitudes, depending on what you make of it, such as the following line from character Alex: "You know the good thing about LSD, if you can manage to overcome your fears, you can take your hallucinations wherever you want."²¹

In the 2010s, the output of works focusing on LSD has continued. These include a new edition of Albert Hofmann's classic autobiography *LSD: My Problem Child*. Published in 2013, the year that marked the 70th anniversary of the discovery of LSD, the book features a new translation by ethnobotanist Jonathan Ott and a foreword by Amanda Feilding. A year before he passed away, Hofmann asked Feilding if she could publish his seminal autobiography, and shortly before he died he approved Ott's new translation.²²

The history of LSD is in fact two parallel histories. One of them is a multifaceted subculture involving millions of people. The other has taken place in science and academia and has involved a comparatively very small number of scientists, study participants, and psychiatric patients. After many decades of being more or less banned, scientific studies involving LSD were at last beginning to see the light of day in the twenty-first century. In 2014, the results of an historical LSD study conducted by Dr. Peter Gasser near Bern in Switzerland between 2007 and 2012 were published in the *Journal of Nervous*

and Mental Disease. Gasser is the president of the Swiss Medical Association for Psycholytic Therapy, which was given permission to use LSD as a tool in psychotherapy in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Largely funded by MAPS, the pilot study was the first to be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 40 years, and was conducted to examine safety and efficacy of LSD-assisted psychotherapy. Approved in 2007 and begun in 2008, it included 12 terminally ill patients separated into two groups. One group was administered 200 micrograms of LSD while the other group only received 20 micrograms. The low dosage group said their anxiety increased, while the higher dosage group said the LSD therapy had very positive effects on their anxiety.²³ The study, which evidently was a success, has received a lot of mainstream media attention with articles in *Scientific American*, *The New York Times*, and *The Huffington Post*, to name a few. Incidentally, when Albert Hofmann heard that Steve Jobs regarded LSD as one of the most important things he had done in his life, he wrote a handwritten letter to the Apple co-founder in 2007 asking if he wanted to support the Swiss study.²⁴ Clearly, LSD's return to science meant a lot to Hofmann.

In addition to the MAPS directed LSD study in Switzerland, another study receiving considerable attention is the Beckley Foundation's pioneering LSD brain imaging study. Set up in 2009, the Beckley Foundation—Imperial College Psychopharmacological Research Programme is a collaboration established between Beckley Foundation director Amanda Feilding and Professor David Nutt, Head of Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College London, with Dr. Robin Carhart-Harris as lead researcher. The programme recently carried out the first fMRI and MEG research with LSD (which incidentally was purchased from a Swiss pharmaceutical company). The neuroimaging work was done at Cardiff University and included 20 participants of which 15 were men and five were women. After they were injected with 75 micrograms of LSD, a moderate dose, their brain activity was monitored.²⁵

The team behind the study is currently in the process of analysing the data from the tests. In order to raise money for this work the Beckley Foundation turned to Walacea, a new crowdfunding site for scientific projects. Titled "The World's First Study of the Brain on LSD," the campaign's goal was to raise £25,000. When the campaign ended on 19 April this year, the very date that Albert Hofmann intentionally dosed himself with LSD for the first time, and which has become known by acid enthusiasts all over the world as "Bicycle Day," the campaign had raised more than £53,000.²⁶ Needless to say, this is an impressive figure and if anything it shows that there is a renewed interest in LSD.

Other scientists who are doing LSD related work include researcher Teri Krebs of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and clinical psychologist Pål-Ørjan Johansen. In 2012, the Norway based team published a retrospective meta-analysis of LSD as a treatment for alcoholism where they presented evidence for a beneficial effect of LSD on alcohol abuse. In addition to their scientific work, Krebs and Johansen recently started a non-profit organisation called EmmaSofia for the purpose of expanding access to MDMA and psychedelics. The organisation is also working towards making psychedelics legalised.

Compared with the "crisis" at the start of the new millennium, one could say there are signs of an LSD revival, at least when it comes to psychedelic science. However, it should also be said that the shortage of street acid that was seen in the early 2000s continues some 15 years on. Interestingly, it appears that it is especially hard to come across acid in the United States, the very birth-country of the LSD counterculture. A recent Reset.me article published 16 April, which marked the anniversary of the discovery of LSD's psychedelic properties, even went under the blunt title "It's Extremely Hard to Find LSD in the US—Here's Why." The article recounted the usual possible reasons to why it is so hard to come across street acid. These include the decade and a half old Wamego bust, difficulty in obtaining ergotamine, and the two decades old demise of the Deadhead scene.

The shortage of street acid is reflected in the entry pages of Erowid Center's pill-testing program EcstasyData.org. Despite its name, EcstasyData.org publish test results of a wide range of

drugs, including LSD. When browsing the lab results, LSD samples are scarce and far between. So far this year, there are only three entries of LSD. All three of the samples were blotters. One was bought online, while the other two originated from cities in the U.S. Interestingly, some of the samples tested between 2013 and 2014 contained higher doses than what was seen in the previously discussed 2005 Spanish analysis. A blotter originating from Spain that was tested in July 2013 contained 123.8 micrograms of LSD. Such doses are rarely found on blotter acid. Other Spanish blotters tested in 2013 contained between 52.1 and 81.9 micrograms. In addition, a blotter originating from Atlanta, Georgia that was tested in December 2014 contained 89.7 micrograms.²⁷

In the early 2010s, there has been an unpredictable and troubling development in LSD culture, namely the appearance on the illicit drug market of a research chemical named 25I-NBOMe. It is still too early to say to what extent the drug will affect the street use of LSD, but there is no doubt that those using the latter will have to be more cautious of what they are ingesting. Just like LSD, 25I-NBOMe is distributed on blotter, and what is even more troubling is that there are several known instances where the drug has been sold as LSD or acid. In fact, 25I-NBOMe has even appeared on sheets featuring the classic Hofmann bicycle ride illustration. Unlike LSD, which has never resulted in any known pharmacological deaths among humans, 25I-NBOMe and other substances in the same group of chemicals, referred to as “25Is,” have already led to several fatal overdoses and prolonged hospitalisations in its very short time of recreational use.

Discovered by chemist Ralf Heim at the Free University of Berlin in 2003, 25I-NBOMe appeared on the illicit drug market around 2010, and is often referred to as a drug with similar effects to LSD. The drug has already been banned in several countries including Australia, Israel, USA, Sweden, and Russia. Interestingly, critique against the 25Is is also coming from within the psychedelic movement itself. For example, web forum Bluelight has posted a safety message, complete with skull and crossbones in a yellow triangle, stating that 25I-NBOMe carries “substantial risks that must be highlighted” and that the drug has killed at recreational doses. Unlike LSD, NBOMes are said to have bitter taste, hence the advice, “If it’s bitter it’s a spitter.” However, in order to be certain about the actual content of a drug, Bluelight urges users to use testing kits.²⁸ Furthermore, Erowid has included a note on their LSD page saying that blotter and liquid LSD being sold in 2013 in the US and Europe actually contained NBOMes. The Erowid website also contains a list of pharmacological (and a few behavioural) fatalities resulting from taking these research chemicals. Several of those who are included in the list took what they believed was LSD.²⁹

The entry pages of EcstasyData.org contain samples of NBOMes, some of which were sold as LSD. For example, a blotter sold as LSD in Spain contained 25I-NBOMe.³⁰ Named “Bicycle,” this red and yellow sample tested in 2013 is clearly part of the upper right corner of a blotter sheet featuring the classic Hofmann bicycle ride illustration. Moreover, a 2012 test of a liquid sold as LSD in Wisconsin showed that it contained 2C-NBOMe.³¹ Seeing that the appearance of counterfeit acid will probably continue, the work carried out by EcstasyData.org and other similar harm-reduction websites will continue to be hugely important.

Needless to say, the appearance of 25Is presumably has had a psychological effect on most LSD users. Before the NBOMes, the worst that could happen when taking LSD was having a difficult, or even traumatic, experience. Today, LSD users stand the risk of unknowingly taking a completely different drug that may lead to a fatal overdose or hospitalisation. Rarely has Timothy Leary’s old motto “Just Say Know,” or good old advice such as “Know Your Source,” been more appropriate as when it comes to contemporary use of street acid. Only time will tell what will become of these research chemicals. If enough users realise the risks associated with these drugs and stop using them, they might be reduced to a short episode in twenty-first century illicit drug culture. However, if the War on (some) Drugs continues, there may turn up new substances that are equally, if not more, problematic as the NBOMes.

New technology often brings with it new behavioural patterns. This has also affected the way

LSD is being sold. Before the millennium LSD was often traded at rave parties, music festivals, and concerts, but in the 2010s the drug also became available online. The most well-known marketplace for drugs, including psychedelics such as LSD, was Silk Road. The online black market existed on and off between 2011 and 2014 and was operated as a Tor hidden service, which enabled users to browse the site anonymously. Of the 10,000 products for sale by vendors in March 2013, 70 percent were drugs.³² Although Silk Road has been shut down, the online sale of LSD continues on the Darknet.³³

The draconian laws for manufacturing or selling LSD persist throughout the world. But the twenty-first century has also seen a wave of decriminalisation of recreational drugs, including LSD, for personal use. For example, as of January 2010, drug users in the Czech Republic can possess small doses of various psychoactive substances. When it comes to LSD, the possession of up to 5 doses is considered a mere misdemeanour offense, which, should the user get caught, would lead to a fine equal to a parking ticket.

Few other psychedelics have been as widely discussed as LSD, yet it has been a very long time since the drug was the main driving force behind the psychedelic movement. Instead psychonauts of today tend to use a number of different substances including psilocybin mushrooms, DMT, Salvia, Ketamine, MDMA, and 2-CB, to name a few. In addition, over the course of the twenty-first century ayahuasca has spawned a movement of its own, which has received a substantial amount of mainstream media coverage. Although several of these mind-altering substances were around already in the 1960s and the 1970s, they were not as widely used. For example, very few hippies in the early counterculture had experimented with ayahuasca.

In his 2012 piece “What can entheogens teach us?” writer James Oroc mentions how different psychedelics are viewed in the contemporary psychedelic movement. Interestingly, it seems Hofmann’s potion is approached with caution even among psychonauts. Many of the 20-somethings that Oroc talks to at festivals “seem to love DMT but are terrified of LSD having already experienced a trip too long and arduous for them . . . and they probably ate a quarter of what their parents did for their first time in the 60s!”³⁴

In trying to understand LSD’s place in the contemporary psychedelic movement, one also needs to consider the hugely influential writer and speaker Terence McKenna. Despite the fact that he has been dead for a decade and a half, he still has a considerable following, and many of his die-hard fans keep his ideas alive on social media. In fact, had it not been for McKenna, it is questionable if psilocybin mushrooms and ayahuasca would have become as widely used as they are today. His strong focus on plant based psychedelics clearly brought less focus on LSD—a semi-synthetic substance manufactured by a chemist in a laboratory—and it is likely that his views have affected how people look upon LSD. When it came to the latter, he simply did not seem impressed by it. For example, in one of his workshops McKenna said that, “LSD is like psychoanalytical Drano. It’s not a personality.”³⁵ Instead, he was drawn towards psilocybin mushrooms, which he talked of as having a “voice,” and ayahuasca, which is referred to as “Mother Ayahuasca” (i.e. a “she”) by many of its users. Admittedly, associating psychedelics with personality is tricky. After all, what people experience on mind-altering substances is highly subjective and varies considerably among different individuals. That said, it is safe to say that very rarely is LSD referred to as having a “voice,” or as a “mother” or a “she,” by its users. This supposed lack of personality is not necessarily to LSD’s disadvantage though. Instead, seeing that there is no personality getting in the way, it may be exactly what makes it suitable to applications such as problem solving or exploring the arts. Although LSD can lead to deeply spiritual or religious experiences, it is safe to say that the drug is less associated with the New Age spirituality (no negative connotation intended) that is increasingly seen in contemporary psychedelia.

Andy Roberts was probably right when he wrote that LSD seemed like yesterday’s drug in the early twenty-first century. During the MDMA craze of the 1990s, which continued into the new millennium, it is probable that many young people thought of LSD as an old hippie drug. However, it seems that every time acid is starting to become a thing of the past, something happens that brings

it back into contemporary culture. At the moment, that “something” includes Beckley Foundation’s current brain imaging study on LSD.

According to psychedelic researcher Teri Krebs, people have used “at least half a billion doses over the years.”³⁶ However, despite the fact that huge numbers of people have taken acid, exceptionally few speak openly about their experiences. Even within contemporary psychedelia there are very few outspoken acid advocates. This is not to say that there are no exceptions. For example, in her piece “There is no hiding with LSD” published in *The Guardian* in 2011, writer and lecturer Dr. Susan Blackmore described LSD as “the ultimate psychedelic.”³⁷ But even if most people still speak in a hushed tone about LSD, its legacy is huge, and as most acidheads can verify, its influence is seen pretty much “everywhere” in our western culture.

So, even with draconian laws and strict controls of ergot alkaloids, it is highly unlikely that LSD will disappear in the foreseeable future. As we all know, governments all over the world have tried to stamp out LSD ever since its ban in the 1960s. Yet it is still here, just like cannabis, another “evil” that the powers that be often tend to demonise. And as long as humans feel compelled to enter altered states of consciousness for the sake of ecstasy, healing, mind-exploration, problem solving, or simply for cosmic entertainment, LSD will most likely continue to be used.

Notes:

1. Roberts, Andy, *Albion Dreaming: A popular history of LSD in Britain* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2012), pp. 263-264.
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* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

ix.

"I return home to the hospital, arrive OK this time, & there are all my roommates in our shared room, & they're having a hard discussion about how there's too many of us, & too little room, & the acid is beginning to come on, the acid is beginning to come on, the acid . . ."

I stop. Now who said this? It's in quotation marks. Is it from a book, am I years ago in college libraries, copying out words like I believe in them? Like it's a simple, *plain* thing to do?

No. These are my words I just copied out, & so nobody else to tell me what them. The narrator lives in a crowded hospital room, with discontented roommates, & he's just dosed, hard let's say.

The scene shifts, now another narrator.

"I'm a small young man, I'd tell ya 5'2" but I'd have to be wearing taller heels on my shoes at the time. But then I meet a woman named Evelyn, & she doesn't notice how not tall I am. She notices my smile, notices it in a way it's not been noticed before.

"Evelyn is brown-haired, turquoise eyes, long & luscious, as I am short, short, *short*. Somehow me, & my sack of things, & I'm moving in with Evelyn into her two-room house.

"Sometimes when I'm at home all day, waiting for her to return, I forget her name. It's something that happens to me, & I go hunting through her mail, looking through her things, trying to remember what her name is. *Evelyn, it's Evelyn.*

"At one point, we're in her back yard, on chaise lounges next to one another, we're naked, lookin' up at the stars, takin' turns cryin' out '*hellloooooo . . .*', until there is a noise, & in comes to the two-room house, bigger than the house, bigger than both of us, & certainly bigger than me, even on platform shoes, Evelyn's big, bruising, bald ex-boyfriend.

“Evelyn throws a sheet on me as I lie there naked on the chaise lounge—she covers up with one too—we pretend to be asleep—but he calls & calls & calls, ‘Ev’lyn, where’s my be’ah, where’s my dinna’, where’s my suppa?’ *Things like that.*

“Evelyn stands, puts on her robe, goes inside. I wait, cowering under my sheet. There’s a gunshot, lots of shooting. Evelyn comes back. She climbs on top of me in my chaise lounge, still under my sheet, but I find myself fucking her anyway. It is strange—it is shocking—but somehow wonderful—because *it is Evelyn*, & she wants sex now—but I want to know how she feels about me—because I’m small, & my heart’s big, & can be broken *so easily*.

“I spend a lot of time looking at her picture postcards, & the photos on her wall, trying to understand my Evelyn.”

The youngest one, in the white nightie & panties, raises her hand to pause me. Even wearing little spectacles to complete her brainy sex kitten look—

She has paged through the ragged copy of *Labyrinthine* I gave each of them, & says, “Is this the same Evelyn you wrote about earlier? The brunette who lives in the cottage, among other poor folks, near the strange rooming house, the one that neuters murderers & thieves? She brings a man home & they have good fun until the balding bruiser boyfriend comes in?”

I stare at her. She licks her lips, smiling, to punish me, then says, “And there are gunshots & then he’s gone.”

“And the bruiser had only claimed her because of recently occupying the town,” says the middle one, Sarah. Now they all know smiles undo me, so she tucks me in the corner of hers, to say a secret, or two.

I look in my own copy, page through, yes. “She was a Traveler, collected picture postcards, well known to do so.”

The oldest finishes. “He’s no Traveler, like her, he’s looking for the red-haired, green-eyed girl.” Pauses. They all laugh like “*aren’t they all in this book?*” But then she finishes. “She’s lonely. He’s nice. She wants sex. It’s enough.”

We’re sitting, each cross-legged, in a circle. Smiling peeks of panties on all sides of me. I hadn’t actually given them their copies. They found them, because they’d stayed in that first room, & decided to root around it.

Then I realized what was going on about the time it was happening on this page. I was innocently playing with some pages from the April 2016 issue of my literary journal, *The Cenacle*, a piece called “Dream Raps, Volume Five,” when all this happened. They found a hook in. And here we are.

I think they are trying to help.

I resume reading. They calm, for the moment, & listen.

“Leaping! Across time & space . . . I am back in high school, yes indeedy, *oh ho ho ho ho*. But I am taking classes now, doing quite well. Getting good grades. *Nothing keeps me down this time around.* I walk into an empty classroom, a’swaggering, thinking nothing can stop me this time.

"But there's a message on the chalkboard:

CLASS IS CANCELLED TODAY.

"*Hm. Feeling slowed, a little off now, uncertain, but then I notice a book on the teacher's otherwise empty desk. The book is called *Nazi Jailbait Bitch*.*"

The three girls snicker.

"What?" I ask.

The youngest talks. "They wanted us for that book."

"Wanted?"

She nods. "Read us more." I slowly do.

"Kind of a porn novel, seems the title charactress seduces & kills Nazis. It's an old cheap paperback. I wonder how it ended up in this empty classroom. Well, I sit on the teacher's desk, my short legs swinging below me, page through it, reading about the various adventures of the **NJB**. She's quite a clever **NJB**, & she kills in a variety of colorful ways.

They hold a world between them, balanced. His hands above, hers below. They speak rarely. He wonders about her kiss, she wonders about his touch. This is something important they do. When it ends, as it has to, & he is bleeding out from a thousand small skin pricks, each a star's deadly jab, she stays right there, so close, loving him, hating him, making sure his last view of the world are her eyes, what he once called 'the opposite of turquoise,' to his last breath, watching her eyes.

"But then I decide whoever owns the book will value it enough such that I should leave it where it is, on the teacher's empty desk in the empty classroom. And I leave, having gained a little bit of the literary experience for myself from that volume, & ready to move on."

They're all nodding. The middle one Sarah says, "They sort of wanted us all. The book, the TV show."

"And the movies," giggles the youngest. "And those video games," says the oldest. They laugh & laugh, calm down, try to behave, then giggle some more.

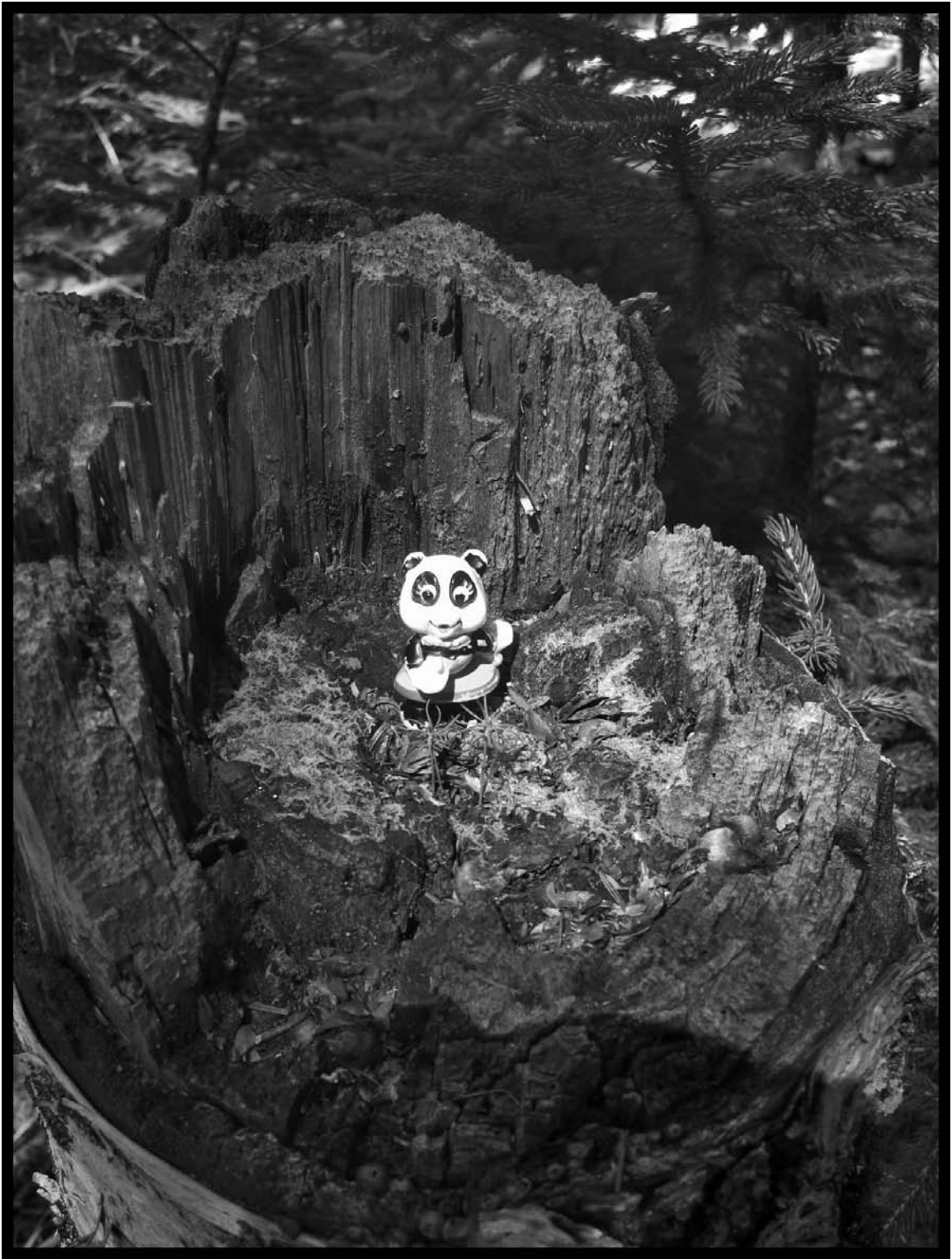
Finally I sigh & read on anyway. "I walk home, each step again leaping me back across time & space. Arrive to a not-quite-then-nor-a-quite-now. It's the little gas station convenience store I worked in, when much younger, the one built right on top of the spaceship buried in the earth. Down a flight of stairs found at the back of the store's walk-in refrigerator, but a locked door below kept me from exploring it too deeply."

They are paging back & forth furiously in their copies of *Labyrinthine*, finding references to ships under the earth.

"Why do you keep doing this, using the same tropes & metaphors over & over?" they seem to ask with one braided voice.

I shrug.

The youngest one click-click-noise-noises to her fellow sometime **NJBs**. They exchange a lot of these noises.



"Can we go?"

"Go?"

"You know the way?"

"Or you can make it up."

I repeat: "Go?"

"To the spaceship. We want to see it now."

"This isn't there. This is the attic, it's high up, & that ship's down low."

This doesn't phase them. I shake my head. They pout. Well. I say, "Maybe after I finish reading this section."

They nod, giggle, quiet, listen.

Helpless, I read on. "I find myself behind the cash register, watching the video monitor of my friends, my dear brothers back at that old brown-paneled barroom we used'ta haunt like a pack of grimy ghosts, all now long lost to me in time & space. They're laughing, they're shaggy-haired, they're grabbing each other's shoulders & hands. *They're funny as fuck.*"

"How?" one asks. They're all leaning over me, reading the lines in the magazine too.

I shake my head. "We drank. We didn't have girlfriends, or the Internet. So life was entertaining each other. Alcohol helped."

Their hive mine assesses this. "*We're not going there,*" I state flatly.

They *awww* & *booo* me but I tire of the easy tricks. Shoo them back a bit, & read on.

"And sometimes I just feel like I'm walking blind through the world, wishing I could make a valley for all my loved ones to live together & maybe, *oh you know*, open up the valley to others. Random guy walks in & says, *I love your writing, man*, & I say to him, *I love your writing, man*, & we hug each other affectionately, & it seems as though I'm left wondering what does it mean to be bound by space & time, by finitudes of memories, by the affections that wax & wane in the human heart, & the miracle of the greener world, & the miracle of music, & the miracle of *breathing in, breathing out*, & keeping somehow, some way, by years & miles & years & miles, your heart open to all."

I stop. Now they are listening. Sort of calmer & more raised up same time.

I stand. "OK. We can go the short or longer way."

Silence. Waiting.

"Shorter we just go there, I make us a quick trip down. Longer, we get there eventually."

Consult, consult. Click-click-noise-noise.

"Long way. But make it interesting."

I nod. No sweat. I motion them to take each other's hands & follow me. I take none of them. Can't, don't, can't have a favorite. We pass through the mirror to the next room, where I look back & see all of us still. But, in this room, just me. They're tucked in my mind. Easier to manage.

I can tell they don't like it as much, but I promised a good way along to the spaceship. Here goes.

(. . . so I stretch out on my bed, long legs dangling far over the edge, curtains closed so I cannot see the many other beds in the room . . . & so I put on my headphones, turn on my cassette player because that very day I'd recorded off the radio a new album by my favorite band . . . sink into my music, sink into my hospital bed, deep into my hospital bed . . . listening to those songs I recorded off my radio, holding the tape player near to the speaker, & they're all wonderful songs, deep, tragic in ways I don't know, they're beautiful, beautiful songs . . . they make me happy . . . & then the DJ, Commander Q, says the name of the album is *Wish You Were Here*, & I think that too, tonight, thinking back, thinking forward, thinking across those miles, turquoise eyes, turquoise eyes, wish you were here . . .)

x.

I'm going to school again, now, Evelyn smiles me each time I leave for class, my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box in hand, trying to make myself something after all these sad nothing years.

At my school, there's a woman who keeps following me around. Oh, it's not romantic or nothin' like that. She's an automaton, & she wants me to kill her, & she hands me two guns for the task. She pleads & begs & says *just finish me & you'll be a better man for it*.

Well, we walk out to a empty park with lots of trees, & find a particularly nice tree where I promise I'll bury her under, give her some dignity, being she doesn't feel any.

[“Why?” asks the braided voice in my head.

I try, but hard to push a voice in your head back a pace.

“Why?” they press.

“You won't like it.”

They press harder.

“OK OK” I push back. “She's an old model of sentient sex toy. They retired her & that's why she's at school. Retraining.”

“For what?”

“For whatever. Not many models of her kind make it. They often end up finding someone kind & willing to end them.”

They don't like this, but I clear my throat in their direction, signaling I intend to resume.]

And I shoot right at her, & they don't work right, these guns, they seem to go off wrong, & yet one bullet does seem to pierce her head, & she dies—or she seems to die—falls heavy to the ground—and I realize I don't have a shovel—so I use these guns to dig a hole.

It's not a very good hole, & so I have to disassemble her into much smaller pieces by hand, & some of her screws don't come out right so I have to snap them off—but eventually I get her all into pieces, & I sort of line them up in the hole with a little bit of dignity to the whole thing—and I don't exactly say a prayer over the whole thing but I do say, *I hope you rest in peace*.

[the three of them are now quite spooked & I'm not sure why. Then it hits me.

[“Emandia,” I say.

[They nod, barely.

[Joining them in my mind, I find that we are in a room that is also a bed, the lighting is roseate, & they sort of huddle around me.

[“Pull off your panties,” I say with the kind of a voice they'll respond to.

[They do & I see little or nothing there for any of them. They are blushing some, but more waiting.

[“Each take a hold & pull off mine,” I say, quietly. No order in it.
 [They do, & see my cock is big & full right now. Turn away all 3 to snatch at panties.
 [“No. Show me.”
 [Now I see sweet shaven little cunts. I’m sure if I’d shown a cunt of my own they’d have responded the same way.
 [Then I notice the youngest one’s sweet cunt is sort of alternating with her own nice cock, & the other begin to as well.
 [“OK, pantie up,” I say. Now nude, none of them want to until I say it again with a nod. They slowly do.]

I find myself wandering the campus trying to dispose of the guns, & that seems to be a harder thing to do than I thought. At one point I end up in maybe my old dorm room, maybe it’s a friend’s, from the month I tried the local college. I’m smoking something good on TV, maybe to take my mind off the whole thing—it’s important & not important at the same time—

& there are no lights on in the dorm room—though it’s nearly noon—& there are people sleeping in it too, maybe sleeping off a party, I really don’t know—& I turn on the lights from a bank of switches, & the people sleeping complain—though it’s nearly noon—& I can’t get them off again—& I think to myself, *goddamn*, & I go over to the wall, & it’s a brick wall—& there’s a brick loose in it, nobody’s looking because they’re all asleep—& I pull the loose brick out, it’s tough but it comes out.

Behind the brick there’s empty space, & so I shove the guns in there, put the brick back in place, & realize the deed is done, so go back to smoking my TV program. There are others watching me now, but *they just don’t know*.

[I shake them out of my head so that we are facing each other.
 “Do you want more clothes?”

Vigorous head shake. “Since we’re not Maya or Christina, or red-haired & green-eyed, we’ll take pigtailed & nighties,” their voice is single, mocking, teasing, & yet waiting to be shown more. I think they prefer me to Benny Big Dreams, though I don’t know why.]

xi.

It was a movie, or a dream I had that night, listening to that cassette of my favorite band on my headphones in my hospital bed, or maybe it happened to me, why I ended up in this hospital bed, in this too-crowded room, with the quarreling roommates, the acid coming on, the acid coming on . . .

[I give each of them a tab of *Alice* LSD on her pretty little tongue, they chew & smile to harass me, we sit in a circle on our bed, I tell them to keep eyes closed & listen. I can hear them click-click-noise-noise trying to decide about me, still angry at Global, willing to mull a switch of team, *if they all agree*.]

Their village was gone, destroyed? We find a group of people traveling together. They embody their lost culture. They carry its trinkets, its memories, its seeds, & they travel on & on. They become adaptable to many situations, to the dryness, to the parched heat of the desert, metallic chill of the mountains, the strange magick of certain Woods & on occasions when everyone seems to feel it, & they do a lot, a sad collective feeling, they will brew a trinket tea together that will allow them to cluster dream & live anew in their lost home, to walk around, to touch its details, its smells, its tastes, the faces that are not among them anymore, what the air was like, important sounds & not important sounds. It helps them greatly, these rare nights, to keep going . . .

[They fall asleep around me, which is good, it helps to move both laterally & vertically in dreams]

xii.

We are walking through another mirror while still together in that bed-sized room while still they are iterated & on back to their sleeping forms in the attic where Global Wall left them—

Through this mirror to the White Woods, them no longer in nighties & pigtails to my pleasure, but sort of spangled & glowsticked drapery that leads girls to each other, naturally, whatever Nature is—

They look at me, but pretty girls at strange Woodsy festivals need no leader or direction, yet still they won't let me fade off, & so I come along half-spectre-like, not feeling anything resembling dancing yet—

The path seems to begin back there, you can see the light down there, & probably grey hills below that we climbed, because I wanted to see their eyes as we entered these throbby hummy drumming White Woods, & as their clothes shifted from pleasing to pleasure—

Every path through Woods is rough & temporary, begins to leave again as soon as one's step leaves—so one learns to walk more like an animal, where each step is like a kind of word, of flesh,

of movement, a danger & curiosity in each one & whatever this means to a brain used to paths of cement & power—

A hand reaches into the murk I'm in & pulls me along, the three of them would no more abandon me than each other even as the music pulls them on & on & in & in & through—

Some kind of open area now, surrounded by trees still, very tall old ones, pale but more like glowing, like light was language, like how they might say something by glowing more or less or in combination—

And the *Hmmm* beneath it all, the rhythm, the beats, their movement among each other, I near, I enter, the warm snaky *Hmmm*, I'm fine drifting now, I'm fine, with pen, drifting away—

xiii.

There was this other woman I meet at school, older woman, sixty, eighty, a thousand, it was hard to say. Plain-looking woman but somewhat strange. We near each other, sometimes get along. Both back at school, trying to turn our nothing selves into something at last.

There was one time in the cafeteria where she's sitting with someone else, & I was sitting nearby. I had my *favoritest* peanut butter jelly & cottage cheese sandwich. *Favoritest*. I would make it up in Evelyn's tiny kitchen, & I'd wrap it in tin foil, & then I'd put it in a plastic baggy, & *then* I'd put it in my little sandwich-carrying case, & then put that inside my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box, & I would make sure nobody touched my lunch box but me, because I knew what a tasty sandwich lay within.

But then he left, & now we're sitting together, chairs facing each other, & I want to take her hand, talk about a man's feeling of possession, but I don't quite [the youngest one distracts me by dancing nebulously around my writing hand & arm, breathing in, breathing out, too sweet almost to be

seducing], & anyway she'd probably misunderstand & think I meant me & her, when I didn't at all. I was just practicing for later that night with someone completely different. *Evelyn, of course, you know that.*

But she has to go. I can tell she has to go because she's putting her screwdrivers, wrenches, & various colored nails back into her strange wooden box. It had all sorts of symbols on it. You won't find them on the Google, or in big dictionaries, or in arcane volumes in the library. No, sir. It also looks like it had been through fire a couple times. There are scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It's a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed [I think she's kissing but clouds, laughing, made up words to distract me] the seven seas.

I collect my spoons & stuff them into my bag, but it's too light & I panic. *Where is my sandwich? Oh, there you are, sandwich. Still in the sandwich container.* I was very worried but now I feel reassured, & then I depart too, & I'm back working in my office.

The school gave me a job to help me pay for my classes—which is located at the part of the building that's not yet built, so it's actually a worksite—but I have a cubicle in the middle of the worksite. It's:

CLICK CLICK

NOISE-NOISE

all day long. The crazy sounds of work around me as I'm trying to type on my typewriter, fill out forms, answer the telephone. Most of the questions are about the live feed from 1968, it's glitchy today, & seems to only show war riots, nothing pretty, nothing hippie. People call and complain. *They want hippie.*

[She is clogging up my mind now & so I'm confusing writing with slinking around her spangles & stars. As I feel along, she renders in flesh what I'm wanting, thinking, beneath what I'm thinking, moans like words like touch like squeeze like release, *like better than release*]

Late afternoon, as often happens, all the workers in their hard hats gather in a certain corner of the worksite to watch a sort of live cartoon that appears there every day to entertain them, some kind of pretty girl dancing merrily, her face grows older, younger, she's shy, she's bold, she clearly delights in dancing for the workers until their break is up, & then she departs, & I go home but, again, *no one touches my lunch box.*

[Read this, to me, I say to her, my hand on her wrist, her face smeared with play & lust. Tiny spectacles appear before her sweet eyes, her road-wrecking lips read:

*You wonder what kind of project could this be, & if I tell you it is a film, you would not believe me & say, oh no, strange sir, film was conceived only recently, & I will say to you in response, you have not seen **Remoteland**, you have not seen **Remoteland**. You have not seen **Remoteland** . . .]*

xiv.

We finish together & we smile & I am ready to tell Evelyn why I am so short now, 5'2", if that, this is an important part of why, she listens, & I watch her listening, & she smiling prompts me to continue when I am too long silent watching her listen—

[Afternoon. They sleep in a group in the grass. A field we found. Hilly. White Woods all around. I sit near writing. Wondering the how & the why of this. Pages on, pages back, how, why.



[They stand, a row, & begin to stretch in various poses. Arms high, low, crossed with legs, balanced on one foot & reaching out, standing with hands stretched, bending wide & near, till a kind of silent signal & they conclude, bow briefly to each other, smile, tumble around me again, to tease & watch. I resume.]

There were numbers crawling along every surface that I could see, & there were letters & symbols & formulars & someone said, *read 'em, what do they say?* I peered closer & I couldn't see because they kept changing, I couldn't focus on one number or letter or symbol long enough to see what it said, because it changed the moment I focused on it to something else, *something else, something else, something else.*

& they crawled on my hands & they crawled on the ceiling & they crawled on the walls & they crawled on the pictures in the pictures in the picture frames & they crawled on the windows & they crawled on the floor & they seemed to adhere to the kind of surface that they crawled through. Sometimes they were more old-school computer style numbers, sometimes they were more curvy, sometimes they were pixely. They took on the form of what they crawled on.

& there was nothing to say about them. There was no explanation really, there was no *this is what it means*, & yet it wasn't meaningless, but it had no meaning. It was somewhere in between, maybe somewhere off that narrow scale. *Wow. Fucking wow.*

Went on all night, went into the next day. I climbed the stairs &, instead of on the floor there being numbers, there were patterns, strange craquelure patterns, but everywhere else numbers, & I'm still looking for them even now.

"Even now," I say, not quite meeting her turquoise eyes.

[She wakes, the youngest one. The others sleep on, or seem to.

[Sits next to me. Holds my hand. No trick. No game. Curiosity.

["Why do you write this book?"

["Because I do."

["But why?"

["Because I have been for 10 years. And the ones before it stretching most of my years back."

["Don't you know?"

[Briefly, we are where I am now, on a bus, riding through a cool summer's day, clouds grey & heavy above, but calm for now. Two girls in the seats in front of me, I'm in the very back, are watching movies on their book-sized gadgets. Asian faces on the screens, Asian subtitles. I notice most of the actors have round, un-Asian eyes, & wonder about this.

[She's curled into me, now, on that hill, near her others, just with me on this bus. Waiting. Whatever I say. However long it takes. OK.

["It began a long time ago, before book-sized gadgets showing movies on buses. There was TV, radio, movies, books. Where you were more your whole world.

["Books were what best showed me the bigger world, promised that what little I had & knew was not all.

[“I liked the words, their sounds, their mysteries. I liked that what was within me could partner with the world through language to *make something*. Sometimes something good, even fascinating.”]

[“Is that why you do it now?”]

[“Yes, but also to connect with who I was, learning of that, feeling new how it felt then. Remembering, continuing.”]

[She’s silent, thinking. Nods, but vaguely.]

[“Who are you? I don’t even know your name.”]

[“Ask me.”]

[“What is your name?”]

[She smiles, playfulness hinting her eyes. “It’s April.”]

[“Like the month?”]

[“Like the month you were born in, Raymond.”]

[I start a little. “Why April?”]

[“That’s why.”]

[I nod. But vaguely. “Who were you before you were with Global Wall?”]

[“Just a girl. Pretty face. Promising body. Unformed mind.”]

[“His favorite.”]

[She laughs. “Yours too.”]

[I nod. “True, but not the only reason.”]

[The others stir, & April & I return fully to the hill. They know they missed something, I’ll owe each of them for now.]

xv.

What I keep mind of is your turquoise eyes. That’s what I keep mind of. For you see, what happens over time is that it seems like first you are you & then I am you & then you are me & then I am me again. Sometimes I am the raggedy fellow & you are the long-haired girl with the turquoise eyes & sometimes I am the raggedy girl & you’re the boy with the turquoise eyes, but you see it’s the turquoise eyes that always keeps me knowing what is what. They remain your constant, girl or boy, whichever is whichever is whichever, however things sort between us, & it’s a good thing too for, in this new place we’ve come to, things look perilous.

We have to learn how to adapt & adjust, we may have to stand in different lines, we may have to sleep on different floors, we may have to speak in different tongues. I think to myself, this is only temporary, I think to myself, as long as I can pick out your turquoise eyes in any situation, any profile, any raid, any examination, any time there’s raising waters or drought, any time under any star, amongst any kind of soil, in & among & through, however it may be, words words words words words words words words, ahhh, turquoise eyes. It’s OK . . .

[Now I’m on the bus alone, for a little while. Passing by Woods, bushes, short cliffs. Listening to some damned pretty fiddly music. Guitars, harmonies.]

[Passing all this at 70 MPH or so. Have passed along these roads before. Will likely many times again.]

[I write, April, because it gives me a sense of *being alive now* that few other things do, as intensely, as fully. When I write, I am doing more than taking up six-foot-plus of space.]

[Nobody asks me to. Nobody perishes if I don't. It's an explain-less must. It relieves the tension, the fear. Beholds anew the open doorway between *in-me* & *out-there*, so I can sit in that doorway, & sing every word my pen is able.]

xvi.

You see, Evelyn, it's like also this.

Once upon a long time ago, might have been a Tuesday, I was looking to make the acquaintance of a *tiny . . . little . . . individdle*. And this tiny little in-di-viddle has been an individdle part of my days & nights ever since. *A tiny . . . little . . . in-di-viddle.*

[They're now all awake & sort of cuddled around me smiling. My eyes are not dull with old remorse, lusting their lithe & lights from a thousand light-years away.]

One time I was in a situation where I could not believe that she was multiple sizes at once, & it was a dangerous situation in which all the circumstances surrounding it were uncertain. There were strange faces, there were swaying hands, there was skipping music, there were all kinds of dark & eerie, as it were, & I worried the fate of this *tiny little in-di-viddle*.

I swept her into my hand, I hustled her along, sometimes she was too entirely big for me to move much, except by sort of a nudging gesture of my shoulder to her ankle that towered above me, & sometimes she was many at once, a horde of her, crazy-eyed & cackling merrily, but I worked to find every single one of her, & *oh!* I made sure that I found them all, even as their numbers shifted higher & lower & stranger still.

[And of course herself can't stay away from a good telling about herself. And now each of the three holds one, each imp gnawing a girlish palm lazily, for show. For giggles. Many of them.]

—& I can tell you now that, as of this telling, this *tiny little in . . . di-viddle* is as safe as I can possibly cause such a being to be, with her love of the game, the shenanigan, the cackling trouble or, as she likes to say, *click-click noise-noise*.

[Cackling as a mixed group of girls & imps, they suddenly race away toward those far trees. I move not to follow. Pretty imaginal girls & imps got ta run free sometimes.]

xvii.

His name, I say, is Daniel. He is a man who has been washed over time by event, person, world, his own body, washed, washed, & washed again. In the last year of his long career as a local sports hero, beloved, best of all players, playing aching always now, or just plain injured & no time to heal, playing for a team the shell of its old championship days, his heart still the hero's even though his body is slower & battered, he persuades all his teammates, except for two, as the season is winding down, the end is near, he says, *why are we earning all this money? We're terrible. Let's donate the rest of our paychecks for the remainder of the season to the good charity. Let's just do it.*

Oh, there's a big event, he doesn't want it, he just wants them to do it quietly but someone gets a hold of the story, & this last good act of his as a professional ball player is pronounced far & wide. Someone later on, years later, long past his time, wants to do a documentary on the man, remember him on film,

& the only sequence of this unfinished film that is ever recovered from the fire is a scene where there's a crash & we arrive suddenly above ground on the subway train as we come out to near his home where he grew up, sparse green, many strange houses, some seemingly built from the bottom up rather than the top-down.

Half-filmed is the story a childhood friend of his told about the time when they were mere tykes in the sweet store—& they'd gathered all their money from paper routes, shaking down littler kids, stealing off their parents' bureaus, finding coins in sewers—they were in this sweet shop, & they knew they could have bought the same sweets somewhere else cheaper, but it was finer doing it this way.

[Maya's with me now, so it seems. Purple eyes, check. Pink-tinted blonde hair, check. Scrawny as Creatures, check. "Yes?" "I'm here." "Why?" "Not sure. The others left." "Yes. True." She looks at me. "I'll keep you company for now." I want to say one thing or another, but I don't. Keep writing.]

He said, *it's finer doing it this way because they'll put it in a fancy-looking bag with a ribbon, & we'll look like we're just sittin' pretty, bag full of this sweet candy to share between only us.*

He remembers his last morning as a ball player, the last game he was going to play, probably not more than a series at the end of the game, mop up a lost season. Everybody was going to clap too loud, call it good. Lineman playing a step slow not to sack him. Cornerbacks & safeties letting his slow, wobbly passes through. A touchdown with ten seconds to go, when a dozen wouldn't have helped.

He was lying that morning in his bunk, thinkin', *what kind of Mac-Donald's breakfast am I going to have this morning, is it going to be a big one or a small one?*

If it was the last day of your professional sports career, & you'd already donated all your money for most of the season, so you were kind of on a low budget now, what kind of Mac-Donald's breakfast would you go for? Where would you scrape up the nickels & quarters?—& as you did, would you be thinking to yourself, *wow, this is like way-back-when all over again?*

"You were the friend from his childhood?" Evelyn asks me.

I nod.

"You were taller then?"

"*So damned tall, Evelyn.*"

xviii.

Then she says: What were you like when you were a teenager? Tell me a good story. I can't think of any, so I tell this:

I'm listening to my AM-FM transistor radio late into the night, I listen to song after song, it's like medicine as they say, & I find this singer, his name is James McGunn, & they play a lot of songs by him on this late night radio show hosted by this strange gent called Commander Q, & James McGunn has this album out, it's called **Sco' u'tland**, sort of a strangely punctuated version of *Scotland*.

It's a 90-minute long album. I save up my money, & I buy it on LP, double LP, perhaps even cassette tape as well. I look him up in the music review books in the library, & he has other albums too, some they like & some they don't, & I wonder who he is, who is this James McGunn?

When I'm not listening to his double LP **Sco'utland**, I'm walking down the street with my transistor radio poked right at my ear, hopin' he'll come on. Maybe Commander Q will have an interview with him. Maybe I'll find out more. It's hard to say.

[Maya snickers. "Is this you?" "No, not really. Emotionally, somewhat, but not literally." "Emotionally?" "That young, I loved music unreasonably too, & wanted to feel one of them understood me, could have been my friend." "Oh.")]

Later on, I'm just sittin' somewhere with my favorite com-puter & we're having ourselves a good ole time, not doing much of anything, just sitting with my com-puter, & it starts raining, & my com-puter fills with rain, all her ports, & I panic, try to shake them out. I look around for shelter, & I find this college bookstore, & I bring her inside, & just try to shake her out.

It's just very strange, it's like water that goes sideways & vertical & sticks—it's some kind of gravity-defying water—and I remember this song by James McGunn, it said,—& it was very reassuring though I didn't understand it at the time as now I do—it said, *when the water starts to fall up, forget the king, bring your cup.*

(She laughs merrily. My strange years before her delight her & turn her on. Every time.)

[Maya nudges me. "What? I'm just working." "Where are we right now?" "We?" Charming, & rare, Maya smiles on me. Oh. "This is an old writing joint of mine. The Peoples Donutshop. I used to live near here, long years ago, & still return to remember & renew occasionally." She nods. "It's what I have left of a lot of years, come & gone friends. I wrote here then, a lot, so returning is a touch back to that. The people of my life then are all scattered & gone." She nods, softens. Watches me write on.]

xix.

Nazi Jailbait Bitch likes to say to me: these are the kinds of things you hear when you're riding the local bus & people get to talkin' about their lives & their times & they sometimes tell you lurid details of their escapades, because you see these people are desperately lonely & sad, & they don't understand how the world has tromped on them, year by year by year by year, & the only thing I can say in response to all of this is that some of those strange things really happen to some of those strange people, & so I say to you tonight, one & all, most sincerely: CHOMP THE ORANGE, DO YA?

xx.

Sexxxy, placing the tab on your lover's tongue, watching her chew, swallow, watching him watch you as you chew, swallow. Telling the next story, as the acid is coming on, *oh, luva, the acid is coming on . . .*

Then I travel to a place called Oorous. Seems at first to look like a town, a nice, small town. But I find out eventually that it's a sort of slave camp run by the aliens whose ships have always been overhead.

I arrive in the guise of a reporter, taking a break from his big city newspaper life to write his novel, take the room above the coffee shop, & I come down every morning for my coffee, my raisin toast, light butter, & sometimes a hard-boiled egg.

I set up shop at one of the tables under the elongated awning that the coffee shop features to keep its patrons safe from rain & shine, as they enjoy their beverages & their conversations.

I set up at my table my notebooks, my pens & pencils, a couple of novels I'd like to try (including the new one by Darling Darlene Danger, & my umpteenth read of Cosmic Early's *Aftermath*), & I'm ready to roll. I get to know people though over the course of my days. Oh, there are some times when you'll see me hunched down low, scribbling away, blind to all but my page.

—but then there'll be other times I'll be looking pensively off into the sky, tapping the pencil against my front teeth—& that'll be a good moment to stop & say hi, & chatter a little, & so I get to know people this way.

I get to know that paperboy & teach him that the proper way to eat a Danish, *son, is to keep it wrapped in its plastic & to nibble away. That way you do not get sticky, nor do your newspapers when you deliver them.*

He gets roughed up later by a couple of toughs, who I believe are in cahoots with the aliens. They drag him into an alley to beat him up, 'cuz he was seen with me too much, pallin' around.

I go to that alley & fists start to fly, & they are cowards, these two toughs, & they admit that it wasn't their idea, & I said, *you're not going to do this again. You're going to tell those alien motherfuckers this boy is OK. Got me?* They bleed, shiver, nod.

Eventually, the aliens turn on me too, warn people to stay away from me as they pass by—ones who used to smile upon me—until one morning a black man shows up, tall, handsome, well-spoken. I've heard he's the town minister.

He says, *I understand your problem, & I appreciate you stayin' around*—& I say, *are you really the minister?*—& he says, *no, they got him in hidin', we didn't know what those alien bastards were gonna do to the town leaders when they first arrived, so they think I'm the minister, & they steer clear. They aren't sure what this God thing is about, & they aren't ready to find out yet.*

xxi.

*There were missing pages near the end of **Nazi Jailbait Bitch**, & the very last page was a mangled fragment. But I read it & memorized it & liked to speak it breathlessly into your turquoise eyes: "Wars in the future will be fought in the mind by drugs, dreams, televisions, internet, sex, persuasion, the manipulation of loyalties, needs, desires, to the point where to obey is to receive pleasure & endorsement, & to disobey not punishment but simply nothing. Physical war, impoverishment, suffering, disease, prejudice have all been eradicated at the cost of freedom & self-created identity. This epoch is not sustainable because the world is too badly damaged."*

Where are you, Turquoise Eyes? Where are you? Why am I in this hospital bed? Who am I, Turquoise Eyes?

xxii.

Evelyn finally replies. She likes us to sleep with the bedroom shade open, the moonlight, the stars, the obscure green-&-gold neon sign glare from the S&G Pizza place next door.

[“Is that your way of integrating this into the book?” asks Maya. “Yah. Why not?” “Leave nothing out. Your motto.” “I guess.” She giggles, trying to lighten me a bit. We picture her in pigtails, wide-eyed, smiling, for an elongated moment. Both of us enjoying. I nod. Resume.]

I was a very young woman at the time, & I was trying to find someone. We're far from each other. I try sending

her a note, use a pen that writes on her paper where she's sitting in that ratty old armchair she likes, & I tell her where in the city to go.

She gets up slowly, & gets ready to go slowly, & she floats along, following the course of the river, sometimes floating above the river. She holds the pen & pad in both hands, & I'm writing her instructions on what to do next. Her replies on my pad are short & illegible.

*Sometimes I see from her point of view, as she's floating along to meet me, & we're approaching each other, & I sometimes see from my point of view & her point of view both. We arrive at the same moment through the same cave-like entrance of the bookstore, same aisle, same bookcase, holding between us a book entitled **Labyrinthine**, & it's falling apart. We look at the back cover, & read that **Labyrinthine** describes six stories of imprisonment, each a different kind. **Hm.***

*I begin to sing to her, holding her small soft hands, to reassure her that her long lost soldier boy will come home. I look into her face with all the love I can offer, & reassurance, & I start to sing, **love is a battlefield, love is a battlefield, love is a battlefield.***

xxiii.

"He wasn't supposed to be a ball player. I knew that. He knew that. For years, I would see him playing ball on my black-&-white TV with its Antennar 2000, the kind that gets you in 3 channels, not just 2, & I would watch him scramble & throw, score & score, push his teammates to be the best possible, hand them round the championship trophies as they came, every winter for six straight years, held each one up for just a moment, then hand them 'round to each of his teammates for them to hold, them to feel that shiny, buzzing pride of *winning well*.

"But, Evelyn, I knew the true story. He'd told me. We had a night back in high school, years before, a reunion night, first since our candy-buying days, we were in the same store in town, the gas station convenience store I would work at in a few years, the only one the alien slavers let us run without interference, & we came face to face, him much taller than back when, me growing shorter as I continued to do, & he nodded, & I nodded, & we went back to where we would go in those candy-glorious days, down a long, dingy road, down a hill alongside it, through swamp & reeds, come to a dirty river that ran under a noisy bridge, & sat on the hill under that bridge, & he brought out a big-ass craggy pipe for us to smoke, & he said, *this baggy has the last of my Turkish black hashish, & you & I are going to smoke it all, & I am going to tell you why I am joining the football team tomorrow.*" And we smoked ourselves blind, silly, silent after a long while, after he'd told all, & then I knew what nobody else did, forever.

"He was the boy who knew two sisters. The younger one prettier, of course. They're friendly to him. They're performers & started talking to him between sets, & then they step back inside the roughly constructed performance building, & they are among many performers taking their turn, sort of a calliope of talent & freakishness.

"—& these two sisters are performing with their father on one of the stages, singing as he plays guitar, & their singing moves him, moves him deeply. For a moment, he forgets his wants & his desires, his frustrations, whatever brought him here, there's just this music. *This beautiful music.*

"Later on, there's the fires the performers like, they light them in the field near the performance building, so many dancers, so many drummers, & he finds himself in shadows with the younger one, feeling her up, saying *my god, you sing so beautifully with your sister, your father playing, & you have such*



beautiful tits too.

“—& she laughs, blushes, says *thank you*, but looks somewhere else, toward the many dancers, the many drummers, & he slowly lets her go & thinks *that’s it*—he goes back to where he’s staying—he’s not staying with the performers—no, he has a crappy tent, a few possessions, just another refugee.

“But he begins to gather things, he begins to go to places where he can find paper, he digs himself up a pencil. He finds different colored paper. He finds different colored pencils. *It’s amazing what you can find when a passion grabs your Art, inflicts your mind.*

“—& he begins assembling a colored book filled with colored penciled poems, for the younger sister.

[“Poems like what?” demands Maya suddenly. “Tell me.” I nod, & make one up quick:

It’s the way your breath quicks,
after all the work you did for me,
the pigtails, the skirt so short,
the shiny lips, the wide eyes,
yes, it’s the way your breath,
you forget you’re not the prettiest
because I don’t care, stroke,
longer stroke, it’s the way
your, *there, touch there*, &
you moan how I like, *how*
they all like, it’s the way,
that moment when your breath
quicks, & again, & once more,
& the night goes up wild, wild, *mmahhhh*

Maya nods. OK, for a sudden demand.]

“He puts it together, ties it with bark & twine, assembles it roughly but sincerely. It’s finally done & he brings it back, he stands in the shadows, watching their performance.

“He has his book in his hands, of all these words he’s written, he’s found in himself poetry, praise, longing, desire, put into words. If only some of it, & he’s holding this book & the singing so moves him again, so deeply & so dearly, that all he can do is leave his book on a seat in the very last row, & depart before they finish their last song.”

xxiv.

Down in the hospital basement something’s going on that I’m connected to. Something such ordinary folk as my roommates don’t know about. Something to do with the machinery, the blood & the marrow & the bones & the muscles & the tentacles that undergird this world & all its beauties & terrors.

That’s what’s down in the basement behind a thick door with massive lock that I only have the single key to, & I keep the key hidden on the third floor, the floor my roommates don’t know about. All the walls have been knocked out on this floor, so it’s one big room. You may also notice all the broken glass on the floor, every last instrument, every last drinking glass has been smashed, & I won’t tell you what or how or why right now.

xxv.

I'm still working in the office, the construction around me has finished, but the end of the world has come. I find myself in the file room with crayons, drawing a map to the Place of Art where we plan to go. Before leaving, I walk down the hall, to see my boss, & she's not in, & I realize I'm just going to have to go—& I leave the office, & I leave the building, & walk down the street.

Things are collapsing around me. There are colors missing, certain words in the language are gone, & things begin to rumble below me, above me, along my arms. *Rumble rumble*. I walk, then run, to her two-room house, fetch her, we bring one knapsack each, follow her map far out of the town, follow it loyally until we find the Place of Art, deep in the White Woods, & here we are in the Place of Art, & we walk in, there's a clearing, she tells me to close my eyes, & we begin.

—& it's a visual book I see with my eyes closed, & I'm reading my way along, a long apartment, narrow, living room one end, kitchen & bathroom on the other, & I'm reading in long straight swathes along it, a very crowded party is around me.

I read back & forth across the apartment but I am *in* the apartment now. I'm *in it*, not just reading it. I live there with my beloved Evelyn, this is my home, & it's the night before leaving, & I want to make something of this. I want to read one of my longest poems to everyone. I want to give out copies to everyone so they can read along too, but my beloved Evelyn says *we only have fifteen copies* & there are way more people there.

They are crowded from one end of the apartment to the other. Finally I have a microphone & I call out, *does anyone have a drum to play while I read my poem?* But nobody seems to know me or pay attention. I begin to think, I begin to wonder, I begin to get curious as to what's really happening here.

I open up my eyes for a moment, & see the quiet Woods around me, see Evelyn as a sort of buzzing glow nearby, & realize I'm in two places at once, & I can come back here anytime.

I close my eyes again, & I walk through the crowds, & I come to the back door, & there's a girl returning through the back door, & she's just pissed on the back porch.

She looks at me & says, *sorry*.

No, you're not, I answer.

—& I still want to read something long, poetical, with grace, whimsy, dark hope in these dark times, but I can't do it. I can't do it now, & I keep walking until I find that I am now at the other end of the apartment, but I see that people are leaving. Crowds of people leaving, going out the door, & they're going onto the landing, & they're getting on their bikes, & I just want them to *stop*, want them to *stop leaving*, want them to *stop staying*, *I want the end of the world to stop*. *Stop*, I say. *Stop*.

I hear her voice in my head, & she says, *just open your eyes & wake up, & I do*.

xxvi.

[Maya nudges again, twice, thrice, a strange smile, & now we're together in the low-lit Great Cavern under The Tangled Gate, where Maya has lived awhile with many Creatures. They are all dozing in

clusters twisting in & out of the many shadows & lit areas. She & I are among quite a few blankets, crimson red, electric blue, pale blue, some browns, a vanilla, smaller ones of yellow & also blue, & on our very shoulders a very handsome brown one, so soft, fringy at its edges, covered in many sober-faced watching bears. Safe, all this.

[I nudge her back, & we are also sitting on a crowded bus speeding through a heavy-clouded green landscape, she holds my hand lightly, one more smile, & a nod to my notebook & pen, & she turns to the window to watch. So we cluster in one place, so we hurl in another.]

*I wake up, & I am again in the strange metallic chair in a spaceship high high **high** above the earth. Trying to explain to them something that we had all come up with, all of us, men & women, the best of those remaining, the ones who hadn't panicked & given up.*

We'd decided to call it United Earth because it was a simple phrase that covered everything that needed to be covered. If we couldn't be united, that'd be about it, & I was trying to tell them about it. But I kept drifting back into dreaming, & each time the dream was different, there was no connection between them, there was no link.

*I wake with some strength & I try to tell them that we meant it this time. **We meant it. Please help. Please help, we need it,** & then I drift away, & find myself in my school again.*

It's a long, long building, & I walk to my classroom on the far end, having missed class again. Find out it's cancelled, & I don't know where to go because I have missed so many classes that I thought today, when I woke up so full of energy & life, I was going to catch up on all my classes.

*I was going to do what I had to do, talk to the teachers, even Mrs. Wordsley with her spooky box, talk to others & say, **this is the day I put my foot down & get it together,** & just as I'm getting it together the class is cancelled, & just as that happens, & I'm sort of wandering away vaguely, well, this man comes up to me & says, **hey, big man, you have a big hole in your pants, on the back,** & I sort of lean back, twist my neck around & sure enough, there's a big hole in my pants that I hadn't even noticed.*

*I thought, **I've got to go back to the hospital room where I keep my other two pairs of pants, & change, & get this pair of pants fixed,** & it's getting all so muddled, it's not perfect, what of those vows, & I drift & drift & drift toward those pants, & eventually I find myself awake in the metallic chair, talking to them again about United Earth, & it seems like they're saying, **we want to believe, we want to believe you this time, but we don't know if we can, & we don't know if there's time, & we don't know if this isn't for the best.***

*& I'm nodding & I'm thinking, I'm thinking that if I don't say something useful here I'm going to just drift away into another dream, & it's just going to be pointless because eventually I'm going to wake up back down there & I'll have accomplished nothing but caused myself a lot of pain & so I say to them, with what's left of me, **there is a future in which we all live together, & there is a big library that we go to, to remind us of our sordid & bloody past, & some of us will stay there for weeks, if not months, to study it, & to try to figure out what not to do wrong again, & we need your help to build that world & that library, & that library will be our promise to you, please help,** & then I drift back again into dream.*

xxvii.

We breathe slowly, deeply, in, out, in, out, & close our eyes again, & travel deeper into the Island's magical White Woods, until we find a clearing.

The clearing becomes a temple, shaped by the full moonlight—

We enter the temple, & arrive to the deep desert—

We pass along, far along, deeper into the desert, & come to a little shack with an exotic nearly toothless little man who gnatters high & low at us, & Evelyn laughs & gnatters high & low back at him, & I try too, & I'm not so good at it, but I try again & again—

—& he whispers in her ear, then mine, the words we need to send us on our way to the town deep & far from anywhere else—

—& we will travel & travel & eventually though we come again to the Woods, & there is a road—

The road brings us to the Village he whispered about, & the Village doesn't have many buildings in it, it's hardly a Village at all, & we have to pick the right one, but there are so few. Evelyn points, *there*. The one with no main entrance.

It's huge. It's like a mountain of a building, like it's cut from rock itself, shaped into doors & windows, floors & entrances, unknown number—

—& we enter through a door, a guess, a hope it's right, & come to a room, lined on three sides with books, floor to ceiling, on the floor, there's a fireplace crackling & snapping, & before us some small chairs, & an armchair turned away, & there is someone in that armchair that you cannot see that motions us in our minds to each sit in one of the little chairs, to be comfortable, to be ready to learn.

Are you ready to learn the secrets of this strange town called Wytner?

xxviii.

This someone then speaks: "I heard this story at a bus station. I was traveling somewhere far, I'm not sure where I was going, but I had my ticket. I sat next to this old man with a long beard, ragged kind of Army-looking clothes, & he told me that his blood was sick, & that he was dying, & he said that he was doing his best to comfort those around him who did not know how to handle these things as he had learned to.

"—& he said there was this particular moment when he found himself with a group of friends, some of them new, some of them old, & they were in a monastery museum, looking at the blood canvases on the wall, the red bulbs along the staircase, the fake eyeballs hanging in profusion by wires from the attic door.

"—& he finally led them out onto the roof, oh you couldn't go out on the roof of this monastery museum, but he found them an open window, & they all climbed out, all these new & old friends of his, & he showed them the sky from this peculiar perspective.

"It was a beautiful night. Sunset was strange, sort of golden & green, but beautiful, lovely, soft. If anybody had a hand in making this sunset, they were both artistic & skilled, enormously inspired, & he touched each of his friends on the shoulder, tall & short, long-known & new, & he said, *just look at that sunset!*

“He said: *Every time you see a sunset like that hereon, long after I’m gone, think of me, & then one day, when your time has come, you bring your group of friends up on a rooftop that doesn’t expect you to be up on top of it, & you say the same thing to them. You say, **look at this sunset!** Feel it, don’t worry about its details & words. Feel it, & tell them to think of you, & pass it on to others.*”

xxix.

Someone then cackles a bit & speaks the other version: “It doesn’t begin well, on this Island. I’m scared, I’m running. Some kind of dead or deaths behind me. I didn’t cause them, I saw them, heard them, & I’m running, running, & eventually I find that I get to as far on this Island as I can, & away from the scary thing I was running from. *Was it a Beast? What was it?*”

“Hours pass, then a few days, then longer, & nothing happens. I begin to assess my situation more calmly. Oh, I’m still scared, look in every direction often, but here I am. *On this Island.*”

“I study my camera that I brought. It seemed so important before all those tragic scary things that happened after I arrived. But the camera was meant to take pictures of the strange things that they say occur on this Island, the strange thing this Island is. This Island with the mythical timeless portal, that will not be found on any map, & I brought a camera, & I was gonna document it all.

“Just as an experiment, I take a few exploratory pictures. Just around my camp, just to document. But then when I go to pull the roll of film out to develop it, I’d brought all the chemicals & tools, *it just pours, it pours out* the back of the camera. *It’s like there’s nothing but liquid inside this camera, & I just don’t know what to think.*”

“I came here to find out the truth of the Island, & to document it, I meant no harm. But it seems that, since I’ve arrived, things have gone wrong—and then I remember this peculiar bit of advice I was given along the way, as I told various people of my plans to find this Island.

“One of them was a strange old man with a long beard, ragged kind of Army-looking clothes, I don’t even know why he was in my office. He kind of came in with others that I was discussing the matter with, then suddenly he was looking at me. They’d all left, & he was looking at me, & he was saying, *if you’re gonna survive there, you better learn how to hmmmmmm*

“& until now I hadn’t even thought of this advice, but now I sit down, right where I am, right in the clearing where I am, I just sit right down, knowing it’s all too much for me, too bigger than I am, except this one piece of advice, & I sit right down here, & I close my eyes, & I *hmmmmmm*

[Off that bus now, sitting at a table, side by side, in a train station in a city, but also still in the Great Cavern, Creatures awake, sniffing, I’m known in various harmless iterations, & Maya of course is one of them. She nods me finish, & a curious amused gleam like something else too.]

And for just a moment, you are back with me, close, closer than anyone or anything I have ever known, Turquoise Eyes, my Evelyn, Turquoise Eyes, & I hmmmmmm till my breath runs out, and you are gone again, oh my lost heart, you are gone again

[I look up, take a few breaths, look at Maya, relax us fully into the Great Cavern. Creatures in my lap, mostly dozing, though the White Bunny staring me hard with her glittering mesmerizing eyes. Affectionate, but always the weathered eye ’pon me.

[Maya holds out her hand. Three little pills. “One to take now. The next once we are dreaming. The third when needed to go deeper down.” Hm. Lots of words from her. “What about your three?” “Don’t worry. I’ll follow you in.” I choose the pink one, swallow, & let myself settle finally relaxed from long task among Maya, blankets, & Creatures].

xxx.

I wake. Time feels weird, like it’s a now I don’t feel closely like breath & skin. I am alone, no Maya, no Creatures, no blankets.

It’s dark, like that’s all there is, that’s how it is. I hear nothing, like it’s not what one does, or at least not what *I do*.

Trying another sense, I sniff, twice, again, again. Nothing. No flowers, no feces, no home cooking. Taste? I know it’s to do with my tongue, & often pleasure, but, again, nothing.

What was that pill, Maya? And where are you?

Last physical sense, touch. I still have a body, reach out my hands, realize I am lying on the floor, ground, something, so stand, dizzy, crouch quick, sit. Lie back down.

Er. OK. Roll on my stomach. No dizzy, OK. Looking up, into the darkness, I reach out my hands, stretch, stretch. My feet, too, reach that way too, push, push. Tire. My feet & hands gentle to the floor, ground.

Then, something. If I touch my fingers & toes lightly, very lightly to the ground, *I feel something*. A buzzing. No. Yes. A *hmmming*. Just touching lightly like nuzzling a sleeping lover’s cheek. Too much or too little, or long, it’s gone, like it too never was.

But for a few seconds, *hmmming*. A few on, a few off, but patterns don’t work either. I have to vary the length. Like pi, no repeating pattern.

OK. I need more senses involved now, so I touch & try sniffing. Um. Something. Try to imagine a lilac bush, sniff. Something? Maybe.

I try to listen, up from the *hmmming*, into the rest. Nothing. So I try to *hmmm* into the rest & I see it, smell it: *lilac*.

Finally I try them all, taste too. All of them, I *hmmm*, focus, let go, ask, *please, let me, please, let me—*

xxxi.

Marie the red-haired schoolteacher wakes up, looks around, middle of the Woods again.

It’s a cool morning, & her in a light gown, & bare feet. Quiet in these Woods.

She notices her pipe nearby, & picks it up casually. Daniel had taught her the pipe, but mostly how to hold it, how to breathe and blow. She’d asked him to teach her songs to play.

His answer: “The music comes first. The songs come later.” Said things like that which made *so much*

sense coming from his mouth, his expression.

And she sort of knew what he meant. Just playing a pipe, holding it, not worrying the details of right or wrong.

She eventually learned songs, even made him teach her a few, but often she didn't.

She would listen to the sound of the Woods, & play along, finding her place in its music, never the same, these Woods *breathed music*.

Along came two Creatures, which never surprised her. A black bear, & a black & white panda bear. As she played, these bears no higher than her calf danced nearby, both jolly & intricate in their moves—

Eventually the music leads them on their way, & Marie plays along for awhile, happy wondering music, which quite naturally brings along her White Bunny friend & too that scampy little pandy bear, cackling delightedly—

They seem to be urging her up & away, & so she follows along quickly, very quickly, she wonders how fast yet this is how it is with Creatures, one moves as quickly as they will—

Marie's brother Joe is biking along the shore with a small grey hedgehog on his shoulder, squeaking occasionally, it is peaceful to be riding this morning, Joe's looking for Marie still but he's less worried than interested in what adventure she's found.

Then, in the distance, a weird figure. A man, scrawny, seems to be dressed in a suit assembled from many pieces by someone who's never seen a proper one. Curious, Joe pedals harder to catch up to him—this . . . native to this strange Island? But it seems like he's gone from the wide shore in an impossible moment—

& Joe finds his bike rising up into the air impossibly high! The hedgehog squeaks & clings to his shoulder—

Gradually, panic lessing a little, Joe learns how to ride in air. Pedal pedal to keep altitude, stop pedaling to steer course, then pedal some more—

So like this Joe pedals far along till gravity draws him slowly but inevitably back to a road he recognizes as the one he rides to Marie's school—

But she's not at her school so he slows still a distance away—& notices a small blue bear sitting against a tree, looking at him calmly with small black eyes.

Joe gets off his bike, & his hedgehog friend hops off to go & exchange a friendly sniff with the bear. Joe sits nearby.

"I'm looking for my sister Marie. She teaches at that school over there."

The little blue bear puts his paw to his chin, considering.

"I have a friend who gives good advice," he says. Or Joe hears, since he's not sure if Creatures speak aloud or directly in one's mind.



Bloo joins Joe & the hedgehog & they ride through the small town & beyond, ride miles & miles along, never gaining altitude, Joe guesses that was the Islander's trick, riding till they find Bloo's advice-giving friend.

We find Bauer & Schatzi, the panda bear & brown bear respectively, sitting in a clearing with an old friend of theirs, Xavier, or X, a white-furred bear with a handsome black hat & scotch-style scarf.

X has retired from show business, from the Carnival he led for so many years.

[“Retired?” asks Maya, incredulously, her purple eyes flickering 'pon me. “Maybe a vacation?” I suggest timidly. My source material is somewhat dubious.]

X lets his friends know he is seeking a guru who might help him understand the sufferings of the world.

It was something Creatures never understood, in all the years their Carnival hosted the many people folks they'd been set to entertain: why suffer so much?

Their Carnival helped, gave them entertainment & distraction, but did not resolve their suffering. Did not settle the conflicts among people folk. They still hurt each other. Misunderstood the world & hurt each other.

They come to the mountain X seeks, & climb up it awhile in quiet. Or down it really, look, see how they are climbing down a mountain towards its peak.

And arrive to a small hut with no windows or doors. Is there someone inside? They each sit down against the wall of the hut, side by side.

Rising from the deep depths of the mountain's height, a great alien spaceship.

Rolling down the mountain from below, a red & yellow Truckee.

These, no doubt, come to help.

Daniel & Tumbleweed, when we catch up with them, are walking an empty country road, talking about maps within maps & alternative history, as they usually do.

“Is it easier for only one reality to exist, one universe, or many, every possibility?”

“Easy?”

“Toward a conclusion, a finish of the story?”

“Or the countless ones?”

“Yes.”

“If there is a conclusion.”

“If.”

They come along almost of a sudden to a Creature in the form of a small white-furred goose, fetching & intelligent eyes.

“Do you have a problem?” she asks politely.

“Problem?” Daniel replies, kneeling down to speak more levelly to her.

“To solve?”

She is a problem solver, with need of a problem to solve. Daniel invites her to come along & perhaps problems will present themselves.

Kaylee is of the opinion that problems sought will be found, which is fine by her.

Night comes & they find a wide open field to stargaze under.

Up there, emerging from the seeming countless numbers of stars, something, something, an absence, an emptiness, a kind of deep hole in space, & Kaylee makes sure they are clustered & touching as she leads them up, up, up to it, into its absence, into its emptiness, & through & now something of them given, shared, soft at first, not yet audible in such an unplace, & yet now something, a smallest *humming* of their voices, offered together, seeking the touch of ground, the smell of seed & soil, the feel of skin against air, now air to be felt, & all yet still emerging from the *humming*, & this feeling, this absence, this hole through space, knitting it closed with touch, with empathy, with its unknown sufferings contained but bloodless, bloodless to attack anew. They draw closed & closed, & back & back, until they are back together, in their field, touching, watching, listening.

xxxii.

Usually by daylight the movies in the Nada Theater are over, & the seats are empty. Whoever is left picks up all the refuse in the place, as a thankee to management. Self & Ralph retreat to the office behind the projectionist's booth. Cordelia does not join them. Sometimes Charlie Pigeonfoot does.

Truth is, it's hard to clearly say what happens. Maybe everyone just melts away till the return of midnight. Maybe they have become dream fragments of this theater, & so when it retreats into quietude by day, they retreat too. All melts for awhile.

But then *More Fun* does not end one time. It continues on, still no audience, almost like, um, it was trying to lure one by day when no nocturnal patron would come.

When they die, people melt away, become invisible, bit by bit, then these invisible parts fade out entirely. Some call them *melties*.

It's a hard thing to watch in a loved one. The lethargy that sleep does not salve, then the invisibility, like he or she is being randomly gouged out of existence.

You can feel her forearm at first even tho you can no longer see it. Coloring it back, with paint or makeup, does not work. Nothing sticks. She wears long sleeves but eventually they slump empty.

The Postman is now traveling with the Recruiter. The Recruiter is telling this story.

“I was alone when it started happening. I had been for a long time. When I met her, she was sitting under a tree, sorting through an old green jewelry box. She started talking as I approached.”

“It's empty there.”

“Empty?”

She looks up with grey-green eyes that swung briefly through my life & times & found them unexciting. “So if you want a tree, I'll be more agreeable than most. but you won't find anything to stick your stick

in.” Continued sorting her jewelry box.

I pulled out the several guns & knives I had on me, & placed them on the ground between us. I leaned to a crouch.

She keeps sorting. Keeps talking.

“I’d be too tired to fight you anyway.”

“I’m not going to do anything.”

She looks at me again. I jerk back at her glance.

“Would you help me instead?”

I nod, more eagerly than I thought to.

“I used to wear a lot of jewelry. A lot. Some of it cheap, but mostly antique, strange. I thought of it like an extension of myself. Like I was a cake to be decorated.”

I nod.

“I feel my hands going, mostly my left one. It’s not invisible yet. But its like an anti-feeling at first. Not warmth or numbness. Just nothing. The space released where something was, waiting for something else to be now.”

I nod, listen.

She smiles at me suddenly. “I’m left-handed. I was always proud of this. So I decorated my left hand most of all. Rings on all the fingers. Bracelets. Nail decorations. Now I need to accept this coming loss & decorate my right one. Would you help me pick out some things?”

“Did you?” asks The Postman.

The Recruiter nods. “I did. A silver ring with a flat emerald stone. A bracelet designed like the ouroboros. The snake eating its own tail.”

Postman nods.

“I caught us something fresh for dinner that night. She hadn’t eaten well in awhile. You lose your appetite as you disappear. Like your body accepts before you do.”

Postman nods.

“We ate. We talked a little. She told me stories of what she called her ‘pretty days,’ long ago.”

“I arranged myself like a king’s banquet before going out. How much tit should I show tonight? Glossy lipstick? None? I was orchestrating reaction. What they would look at.”

The Recruiter nods, sucks a bone, tosses it into their fire.

“Were you ever in love back then? When it mattered?”

“Once or twice. Once.”

“Did you ever watch her dress for you? Really stop yourself & watch?”

“Not like you’re saying.”

She laughs. “No. You were young & counting the number of baubles on her you would have to maneuver through later.”

“If lucky.”

She nearly laughs.

Some nights the stars are no longer visible, not clouds but poison shrouding them. But tonight they are clear bell high, every one of them.

She has an old sleeping bag, crawls into it deep in the night. Seems asleep a long while, then says, "Safe travels."

"I was never sure if she thought I would be gone by morning or something else."

"What else?"

"I sat there a long time. The stars above. We were camped by a road going back to nature, under an old old willow tree, on the edge of an overgrown tobacco field. It was quiet. Hours passed. I waited. I didn't wait."

"Finally, I picked up one of my guns where I'd let it be, walked over to her curled up in her sleeping bag, shot her in the head three times. The shots sort of ricocheted through the night & back, like a boomerang."

Silence. "It's what you do now."

Nods.

The Recruiter travels far & wide, finding the afflicted & killing them. Three shots to the head, while they sleep, if possible. Always while they are not suspecting, & quickly. No fear, no pain, no surprise in it. If the moment does not come, he lets them go, & moves on.

The Recruiter wants to winnow out the weak so that population thins down eventually to who can "finish the race," whatever this means.

He's good at finding melties in holes & hideaways. He is never cruel. Always sets his weapons down before them.

He never offers The Postman to be his partner, but there's a feeling between them that they might travel together, & helping The Recruiter with his work would be part of this.

The Postman thinks of the girl he lost, as he often does, & the man who took her. Wonders if either of them has become a melty. Probably not. Who knows where they are. Would he, if a gun in hand & a chance?

The Recruiter will on occasion tell very dirty jokes. Suddenly laugh like the world imploding. These jokes were part of his old life & they occur to him at random moments. Like a glitch in his brain's working, like he forgets where & when, & is again recruiting as he once did.



To be continued in Cenacle | 98 | December 2016

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NEW ENGLAND

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Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado, where he is putting together a foundry, and finishing his hovercraft. Also having new thoughts on how to write the last Belize story. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

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Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>. She recently fought a battle with computer issues, & won!

Seamus Heaney was born in Castledawson, Northern Ireland in 1939, & died in Dublin in 2013. Rightly considered one of the 20th century's greatest poets, he received the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature. Scriptor Press published a volume of his poetry, *The End of Art is Peace*, in the 2016 Burning Man Books series, found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His excellent prose appears for the first time in this issue of *The Cenacle*. Congratulations on publishing your book, Jimmy!

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His fine prose in this issue is from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz>.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry first featured in *Cenacle* | 92 | April 2015. Looking forward to one day meeting this good fellow & shaking his hand.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His excellent fiction appears about once a year in *The Cenacle*. Looking forward to a Jellicle Guild gathering soon where he will be reading some of Seamus Heaney's poems, in his gruff, fine, memorable Boston accent.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She is one of the primary reasons why my *Notes from New England* piece in this issue comes out to a happy conclusion.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. This issue was longer in the making than those of the past several years. Took six months in all. If it feels to you like it was made with a kind of joyous fervor, you are spot on!

Victor Vanek lives in The Dalles, Oregon. His beguiling prose-poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 93 | June 2015. I have a feeling there are all sorts of grand, deep mythoses in that man's wonderful head, for him to let out at will.

* * * * *





And the house you live in

will never fall down

if you pity the stranger

who stands at the door.

--Gordon Lightfoot, 1976.

